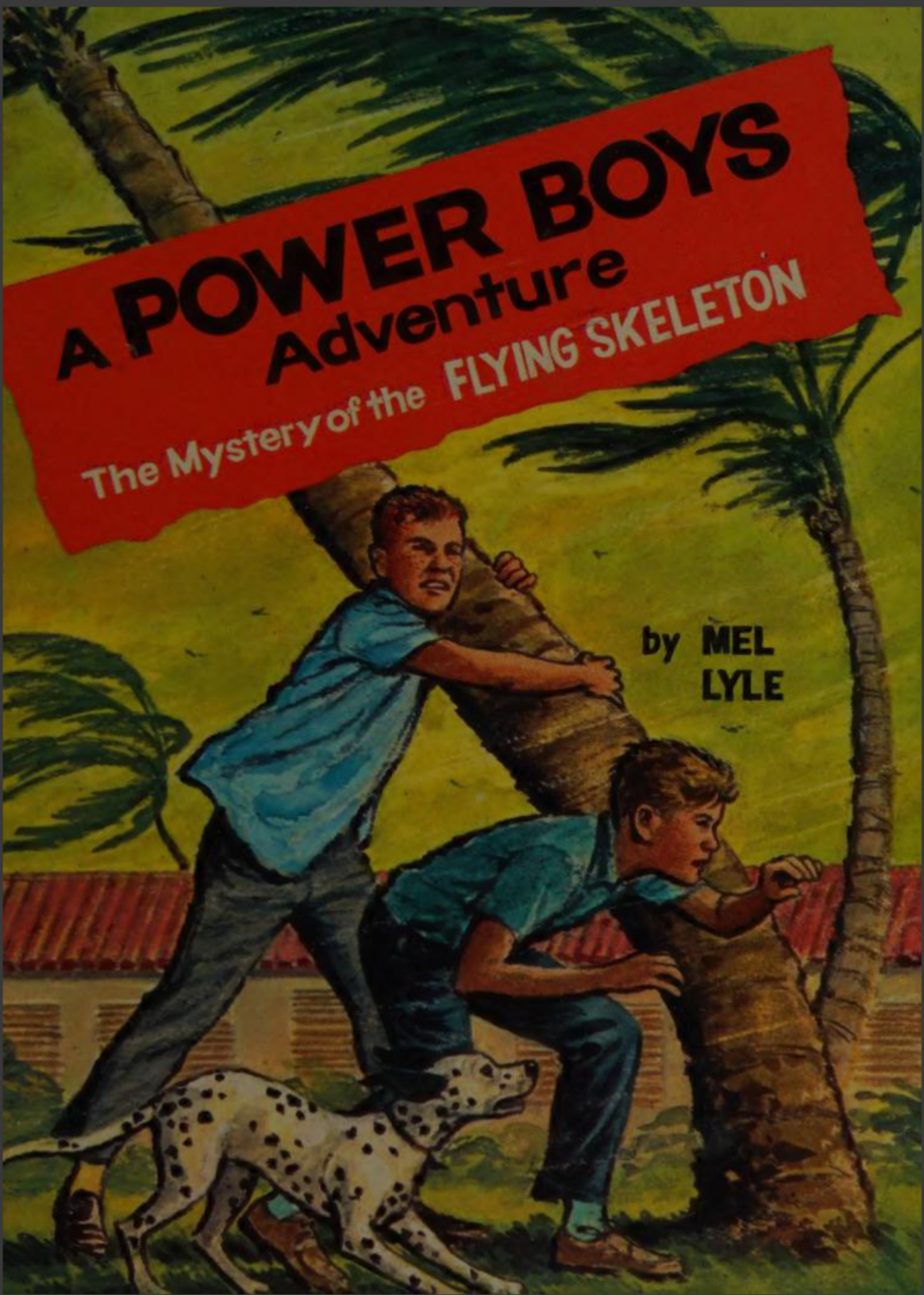


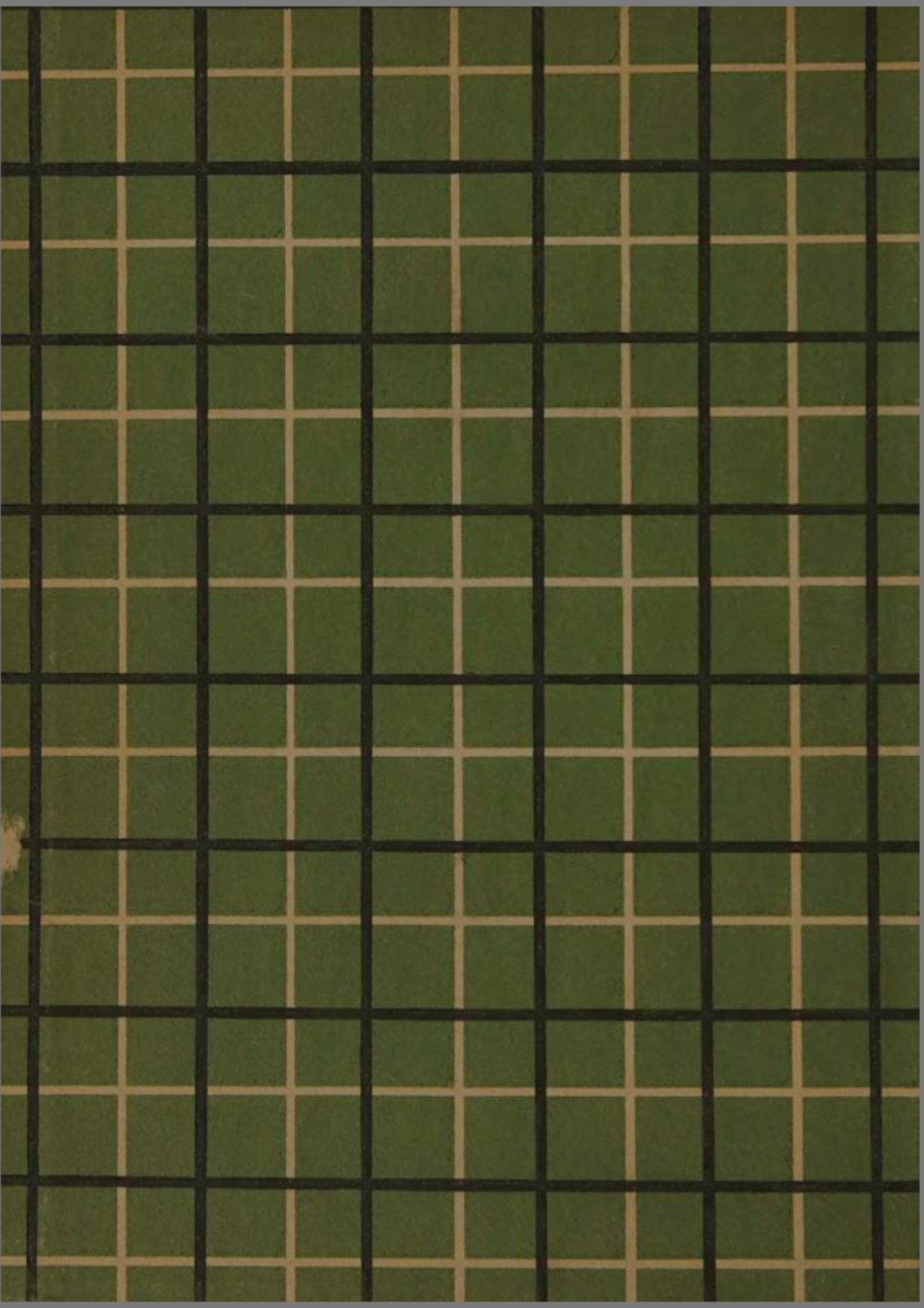


A POWER BOYS

Adventure

The Mystery of the FLYING SKELETON

by MEL
LYLE



A P O W E R B O Y S A D V E N T U R E

The Mystery of
**THE FLYING
SKELETON**

By Mel Lyle

Illustrated by
Raymond Burns

WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY • Racine, Wisconsin

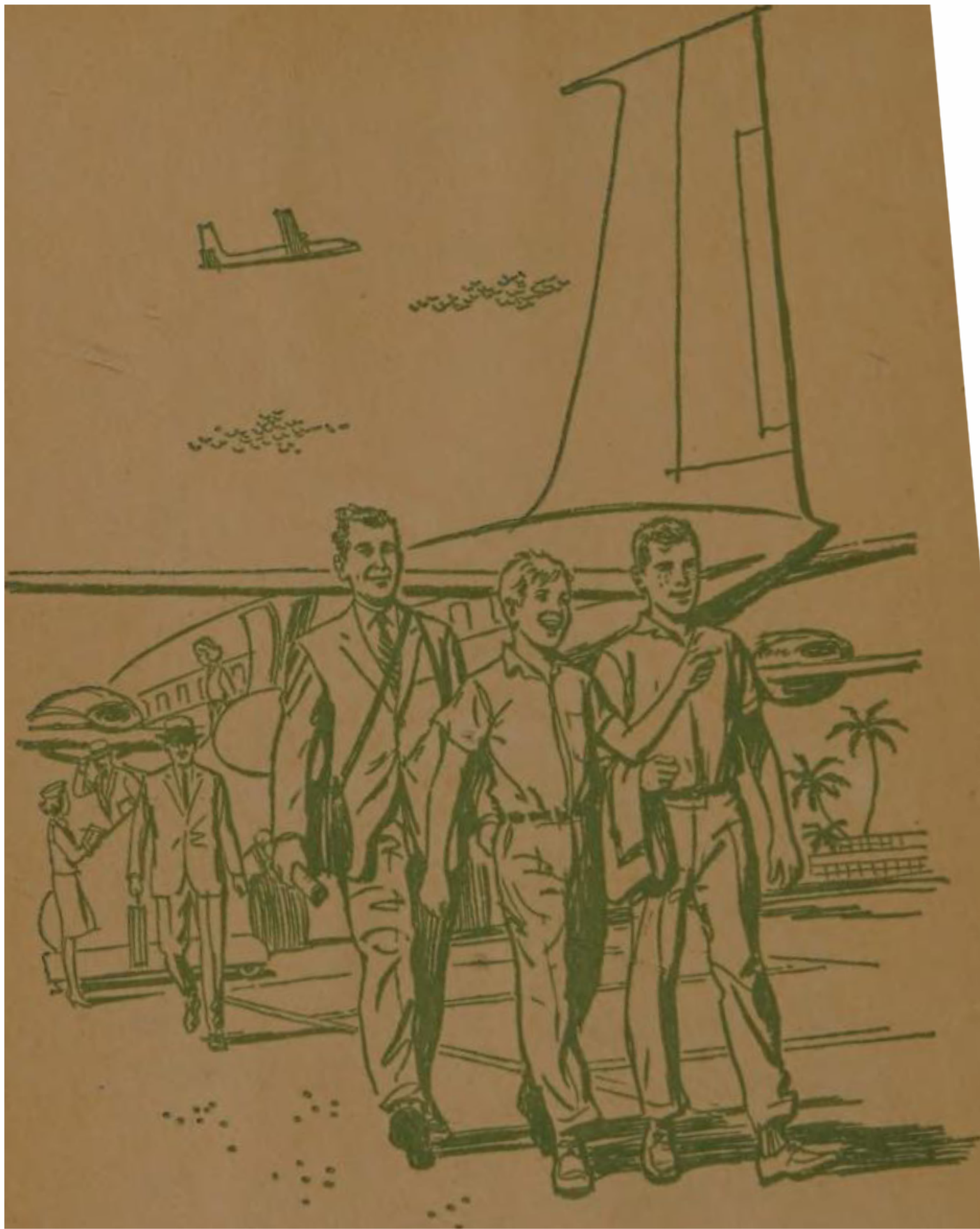
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1

Mysterious Stranger

"Say, isn't this something?" Chip Power said on the way from the jet to the airport terminal.

"It isn't something," his brother Jack replied with a smile. "It's the Miami International Airport."

"No fooling," Chip said.

"Boys, please." Thomas Power admonished his sons. "There's no time for that. You're right, Chip. This is quite an airport. I'm hoping, though, that we don't have to stick around here for hours."

"Will we have to?" Jack asked.

"That's what I want to find out," his father replied. Inside the terminal they stopped to get their bearings.

Chip declared, "I've got an idea."

"Okay," Mr. Power said agreeably. "But first listen to the idea I've got."

"That must be where we pick up our luggage," Jack interrupted, pointing to a waiting crowd.

"Fine. Wait for our things—you and Chip. I guess they haven't arrived from the plane yet."

"Guess not," Jack said, looking around. "I don't hear Blaze barking."

"That was my idea," Chip said to his father. "While we get Blaze and the luggage, Dad, you can be checking on our plane to Key West."

Mr. Power snapped his fingers. "Exactly my thought," he said, smiling.

As their father headed toward the airline's information desk, the boys started off in the opposite direction. But the sudden, frantic wailing of sirens stopped them. They stood motionless, listening.

Then the boys rushed back to their father.

"Where are the sirens, Dad?" they cried.

"How about finding out?" Mr. Power replied very excitedly.

A crowd clogged the approach to an exit to the airfield. Mr. Power and the boys pushed their way through. Over the heads of the crowd, they could see smoke.

The guard standing at the gate shook his head as they approached. "No one's going out there," he said firmly.

"Look," Chip cried out. "It's a plane! And it's burning!"

"I'm a press photographer," Mr. Power told the guard, indicating the camera slung over his shoulder. "Here." He reached for the wallet in his hip pocket. "These are my credentials."

The guard shook his head.

"I just want to get a picture," Mr. Power explained tersely.

"Sure you do. And I told you, no one's going out there. *No one.*"

Mr. Power turned and pushed his way back through the crowd. Jack and Chip followed him.

"Where you going, Dad?" Chip asked.

"Do you think," Mr. Power said without turning,

"that I'm letting a guard keep me from getting a shot of that burning plane?"

A narrow corridor led to another exit. Only one man—a very big man—stood there. Even from the back, it was obvious that he wasn't a guard. He wore a light tan linen suit and an oversized Panama hat.

The man looked over his shoulder, appearing only mildly interested in their hurried approach. A suggestion of a smile remained on his lips.

"Dad," Chip said, grabbing his father's arm, "I don't think you ought to go out there."

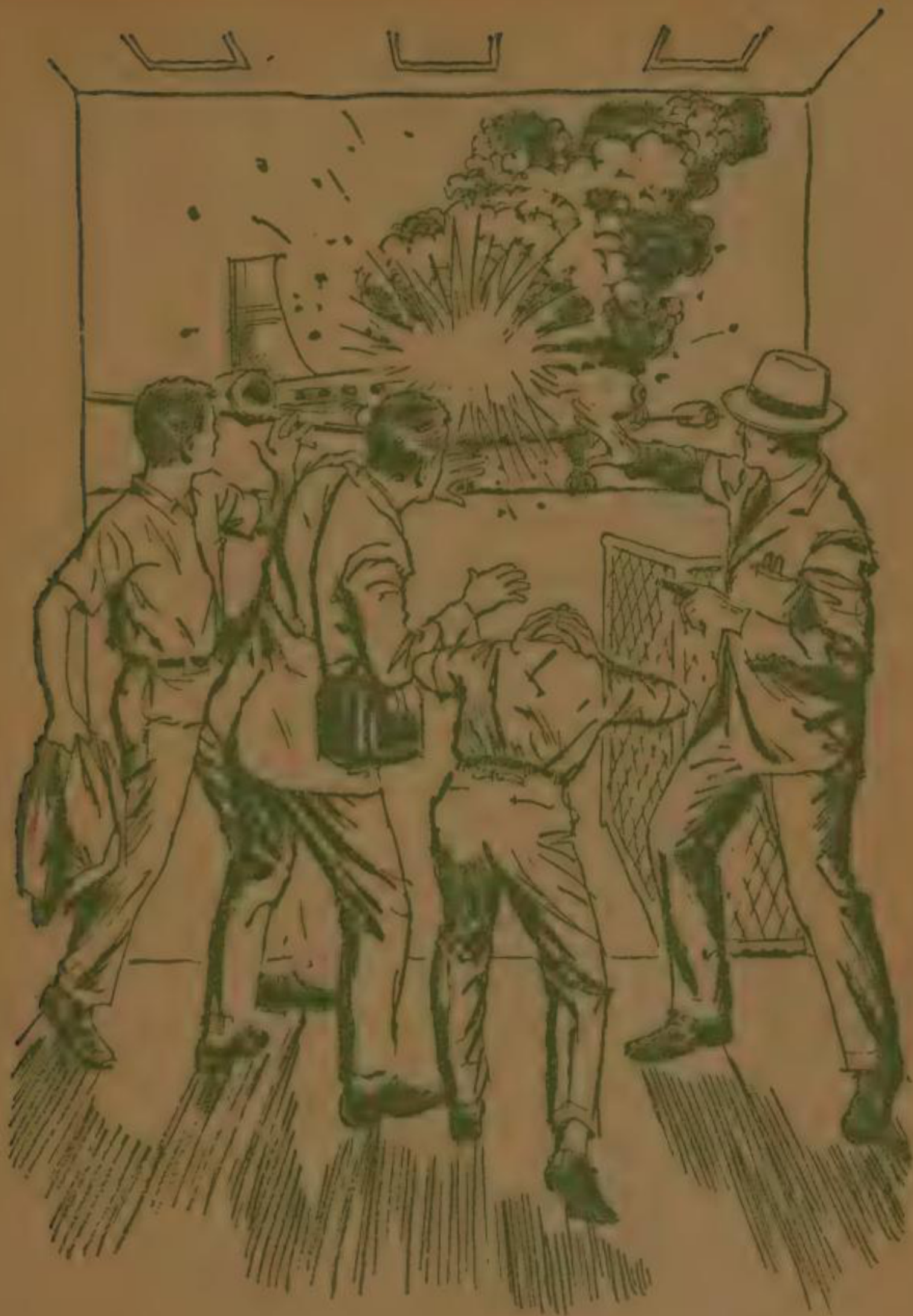
With one jerk, Mr. Power broke Chip's hold.

"Dad," Jack said, "Chip's right—"

Mr. Power headed for the exit. The man standing there turned so that he faced Mr. Power. He completely blocked the exit. He held a slender cigar, daintily.

"The young gentlemen are right," the man murmured. "As it is, we may even be too close. But danger attracts one, does it not?"

As he lifted the cigar to his mouth, the plane exploded. It was almost as if the movement of his arm set off the explosion. Flying, flaming fragments erupted



out of the center of the plane. The men and boys cowered instinctively, raising their arms for protection.

Chip was the first to straighten up. "Look!" he yelled. "That must be that little fire truck. The explosion turned it upside down."

Sirens screamed. An ambulance raced in a weaving pattern onto the field. Its motion fanned the black smoke rising from the dismembered plane.

As Mr. Power was getting his camera set for picture taking, the boys pleaded with him not to go out onto the field because there might be other explosions.

"Don't worry," Mr. Power assured them. "I'll shoot from here."

"You should thank your sons," the big man said, puffing serenely on his cigar. "Had it not been for their caution, you might have been harmed." Then, even though Mr. Power gave no evidence that he was listening, the man added, "I'm assuming they're your sons."

By the way he looked from Mr. Power to the boys, it was plain that he was comparing them. He appeared to be wondering how Mr. Power could have thick black hair, with streaks of premature gray in it, and his sons

have hair so decidedly different. Jack had short, reddish-brown hair, while Chip had blond hair with reddish glints.

"Sure," Chip offered. "We're his sons. I'm Chip and my brother's name is Jack."

"And your father needs some help," the man said, his shadow of a smile still there.

The man and the boys moved to help Mr. Power onto the low barrier separating the terminal from the field. Mr. Power was having difficulty, because one hand was occupied in holding his camera.

"I can make it all right," Mr. Power told them.

"Let's make certain you can." The man talked around the cigar, set in the precise center of his mouth.

He put both his hands at Mr. Power's waist. "Here we go," he said as he heaved him up onto the barrier. The man continued to hold his arms up. He wanted to be sure that Mr. Power had his balance. His raised arms spread wide his unbuttoned coat.

What Chip saw caused him to turn quickly to Jack. He didn't have to tell Jack to look, for Jack was already staring at the man's gun and shoulder holster.

The man lowered his arms, then removed the cigar from his mouth. "Well," he said, as if concluding his thoughts, "nobody will be going to Key West on that plane."

"To Key West!" Chip gasped.

The man nodded. The acrid smoke from the plane had reached them, causing him to clear his throat. "Certainly," he said. "She was flight four-o-eight to Key West."

"Hey," Jack exclaimed, "that must have been the plane we were going on!"

"The four-o-eight—" the man began.

The sirens from two police cars—racing out onto the field, side by side—interrupted the man. He conveyed the rest of what he'd started to say by nodding and tapping his chest. The boys understood that he, too, would have gone on the 408.

Mr. Power turned quickly. "Did you say bound for Key West?" he shouted. The sirens died down just then, but his voice was still louder than normal when he added, "Why, we would have been on her!"

"He would have, too," Chip explained. His gesture

indicated the big man near them.

"Premature," the man muttered. He removed the cigar and leisurely blew smoke from his mouth. "Both the fire and the explosion. Something went wrong." His smile broadened. "Wrong, in the sense that it was all supposed to have happened after takeoff."

Mr. Power looked very puzzled. "How do you know that?" he asked.

The man shrugged. "Deduction," he said, with an air of conceit. "Simple deduction."

Chip restrained himself on the way back to the terminal's waiting room. He looked back, to make sure they were far enough away from the big man, before he spoke. "Dad," he finally burst out, "that guy had a gun on him. Jack saw it, too—the holster and the gun. I'm sure he had something to do with that explosion."

Jack nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised if Chip's right."

"I know I'm right," Chip declared firmly.

"That guy gives you the willies," Jack muttered. "I mean, he's a thoroughly sinister character."

"Shouldn't we turn him in?" Chip went on excitedly.

"If he was the one who blew up that—"

"Wait a minute," Mr. Power said, putting up his hands. "Now wait a minute, both of you. Just because someone seems sinister—"

Jack put up his hands as his father had done. "Now you wait, Dad. How about that gun he was carrying?"

"He might have a permit to carry it," his father said calmly. "Mightn't he?"

"Yeah," Jack agreed slowly. "He might. But it would surprise me if he's got one."

"Well, Dad?" Chip said.

"Well, what?"

"Are we going to report him? Or—or aren't we?"

"Boys," Mr. Power said, "just stop and think. If this man had anything to do with blowing up a plane, would he stand around casually talking to strangers about it? Would he?"

"Maybe," Jack said with emphasis. "He might. That's what makes him—"

"Yeah," Chip interrupted. "How about people who set fire to places?"

"Arsonists," Jack supplied.

"They stick around and watch fires, don't they?" Chip demanded.

Mr. Power suddenly became lost in thought. The boys remained silent. They were giving him a chance to come to a decision about reporting the man to the airport authorities.

"Let's go, fellows," Mr. Power said suddenly. He began striding down the glistening floor of the terminal.

The boys had to hurry to keep up. They smiled at one another, pleased that they had convinced their father.

Mr. Power swerved to the left, and headed for a door to the outside. The boys had to move faster to catch up. Waiting taxicabs lined a covered walk. Beyond them, a neon sign flashed in red and green, RENT A CAR FROM CARR.

Jack and Chip exchanged glances. This time they were perplexed rather than pleased.

Mr. Power stopped abruptly, and the boys almost bumped into him.

"Quiet, fellows," he whispered. "There he is—up ahead of us. Your sinister character. . . ."

2

Footsteps

"Come on, get back, get back," Chip whispered urgently.

The boys and their father scrambled to the protection of one of the thick, square pillars that supported the ceiling of the building.

Mr. Power cautioned Jack and Chip against peeking. "Wasn't that the whole idea, Chip," he said, "of getting back here? You didn't want him to see us."

"Yeah," Chip said. "Sure."

They stood for a long minute, looking at one another, not saying anything.

"What if he walks back this way?" Chip whispered.

"It would be embarrassing if he caught us hiding here." Mr. Power smiled nervously. "All right. Just stay put. I'll take a look."

Suddenly he stepped out into the open.

"He's gone!" Mr. Power exclaimed, staring in amazement.

The boys stepped out from behind the pillar. They also stared at where the big man had been.

"Wow," Chip said, his eyes wide, "talk about vanishing."

"Let's not get melodramatic," Jack objected. "Let's face it; we gave the guy plenty of time to walk away."

"You're right, Jack," Mr. Power said. "Still, I can understand how Chip feels. The man did seem to be there one minute and then—presto—he was gone."

"So he didn't vanish." Chip's eyes grew wide again. "Maybe he went to put a bomb in another plane."

Jack looked pained. "Do you have to be so melodramatic?"

"I'm not being melodramatic. I was just wondering. Can't a guy wonder?"

Mr. Power nodded absently. Still lost in thought, he

headed for the rent-a-car office.

The boys moved along behind him, not saying anything.

Two men stood behind the counter in the office. One was speaking to a young woman who was obviously asking questions about renting a car. The other man stood facing them, but he was busy on the phone.

"You're not renting a car, are you, Dad?" Jack asked.

Mr. Power nodded. "Yes, I am," he replied.

"But, Dad," Chip protested, "it will take us forever to get to Key West in a car."

"Are you doing this because that plane exploded?" Jack asked curiously.

"Partially." Mr. Power continued to nod. "Partially."

"You mean you're never going to fly any more, just because—"

"Jack. There's no point discussing it. I'm renting a car. And we're driving—"

Jack shrugged. "Okay, Dad. But I just don't get it."

The man finished on the phone. While Mr. Power filled out a form, Chip was figuring aloud how long it would take them to get to Key West.

Mr. Power turned. "If we'd have been on that plane that blew up, Chip, we'd never have made it to Key West."

"But, Dad—"

"Let me finish. That explosion, I'm afraid, was intended for the delegates going to the International Conference. I'm just going there to take pictures. But I would have been included. And so would you—even though you'd just have been going along for the ride."

"But the next plane will surely be okay," Chip insisted. "And it'll get us to Key West fast."

Mr. Power turned back to the form. When he completed it, the man behind the counter raised his hand and an attendant in coveralls suddenly appeared.

The attendant led them out to a brand-new compact. As he started the car, he explained how to drive it. "She's got a manual choke. Here's the choke, right here. And you can put her in overdrive—"

"I've driven one of these," Mr. Power told him. "I know how the overdrive works."

The attendant went off, leaving them with the car, its motor running. When he saw they remained

standing outside the car a few moments later, he turned and called back, "Everything okay?"

Mr. Power nodded and yelled back that everything was fine. The attendant made a saluting gesture and went on his way.

"You may not agree with what I just told that fellow," Mr. Power said, turning back to the boys, "when you hear what I've got to say."

"Oh, yeah?" Chip said.

"Both of you have had the wrong impression," Mr. Power began.

"Wrong impression? About what?" Jack asked.

Mr. Power hesitated. "I didn't rent this car to avoid flying down to Key West," he said.

"You didn't?" Chip asked, puzzled.

Jack scratched his red head. He looked puzzled, too. "Dad," he said, "it sure looks as if that's why you rented it."

Mr. Power still appeared hesitant to tell them what was on his mind. "We'd better get going," he said. "There's no reason why we can't talk while we're getting Blaze and the luggage."

But they hurried through the terminal without talking. They had a happy reunion with Blaze, their four-month-old Dalmatian pup who had traveled in a storage area of the plane. Then they gathered up their luggage and headed toward the car.

Even after they were started, Mr. Power did not tell them immediately why he had rented the car. He used the excuse of having difficulty in finding Route 1 to Key West.

"All right," he said at last, as they sped down a flat, straight stretch of road. "I don't like to say this, but I'm not taking you to Key West with me. Wait a minute, wait a minute, don't both of you talk at once. If you just let me talk, I'll probably answer all your questions."

Mr. Power kept his eyes on the road. He didn't glance at Jack and Chip, who were both riding in the front seat with him. Blaze, in the back seat, kept his head out the open window.

Mr. Power told his sons that he planned to drop them off at a motel on an island which was near Key West.

The boys overwhelmed him with a barrage of questions and objections before he could say any more.

"Sure," Mr. Power replied, "that exploding plane in Miami had something to do with my decision."

"What are we going to do while you're away?" Chip asked. "That's what I'd like to know."

"It's your fault, Chip," Jack told his brother. "If you hadn't been so melodramatic. You had to sound off about that big guy and his gun and—"

"Cut it out, Jack," Mr. Power snapped. "Leave Chip alone. I just feel that Key West isn't. . . . There's bound to be a lot of intrigue going on there. It may be just too dangerous a place for you and Chip—"

"What if it isn't?" Jack put in quickly.

"Yeah, yeah," Chip added. "How about that?"

"I'll make a deal with you," Mr. Power said. "You know I'd like to have you down in Key West with me. If I think it's okay after I get there, I'll have you come down."

"You're not just saying this, are you, Dad? I mean, so we'll shut up?" Chip studied his father's face closely.

"Now, Chip, you know better than to ask a question like that."

The boys lapsed into an unhappy silence. Their father

tried in various ways to snap them out of their mood. He mentioned that they would cross a bridge seven miles long. He pointed out things of interest along the way—Brahman cattle, fishermen lined up on the bridges, a store that sold nothing but seashells.

When he saw that he wasn't having any effect on the boys, he switched on the radio.

A newscaster was saying, "... three hundred miles off Dakar, Africa. This weather disturbance has developed winds of peak hurricane proportion—"

"You fellows probably don't want to hear the news," Mr. Power said, turning the dial. He went by a cosmetic commercial to a station broadcasting a singing guitar player.

"That's cool, Dad," Chip said. "Let's hear him."

"He sounds kind of mournful, doesn't he?" Mr. Power asked.

"Well," Jack observed, "you either like Bobby Lands or you don't."

"Maybe I'll learn to like him." Mr. Power chuckled. He was glad the boys were recovering from the surprise of learning that they weren't going to Key West with

him. "And as long as he doesn't set Blaze to howling. . . ."

The hours passed. They crossed the numerous bridges that join the small islands which make up the Florida Keys. As the sunset's colors were reflected by both the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, they went over another bridge and onto Blue Heron Key.

"How about this motel?" Mr. Power said, slowing up. "It's got a vacancy sign."

"It's okay—I guess," Jack said.

"Some places don't take pets, remember," Chip said. "And Blaze is going to be staying with us." Chip sounded worried.

Mr. Power drove into the motel's driveway and stopped. He pulled out the hand brake. "Don't sound so discouraged," he said, looking at Jack and Chip. "Whenever I can, I'll come up. It's only twenty miles from Key West to Blue Heron."

Suddenly, unexpectedly, it started to rain—hard. They had to roll up the windows in a hurry to keep from getting wet.

"It will stop soon," Mr. Power predicted. "We're practically in the tropics. Rains come and go down here in a flash."

"Dad," Jack begged, "can't we go with you to Key West?"

"We could all drive down in the car," Chip put in eagerly.

Mr. Power shook his head. "I'm afraid not." To change the subject, he opened the door and said, "You see, the rain has stopped. What did I tell you about these tropical downpours?"

By the time they had registered at the Blue Heron Motel, the dusk had turned to darkness. Different colored spotlights, clustered at the base of two of the palm trees on the lawn, lit up the trees. Blaze scampered around, nose to the ground, until Chip caught him.

In the motel room, Mr. Power gave a parting handshake to Jack and Chip. Their luggage was still on the floor.

"The kitchenette you've got here," he said, "should be handy for you. But eat out, too. The man in the office said there are a couple good eating places around.

And you should have plenty to do—fishing, boating, swimming.”

“Okay, Dad,” Jack said, grinning, “you’ve sold us on the joint. Blaze might even like it—even though we’ve got him staked out in back of the place.”

“I wish I could convince myself it was all right for you to come with me,” Mr. Power told his sons. “But I can’t.”

“We’ll make out, Dad,” Chip said. “And—and there are no hard feelings.”

“Good! I’ll probably see you tomorrow.”

Mr. Power gave Jack money for food and anything else that they might need while he was gone. As they went outside, Chip reminded him about his promise to visit them as often as possible. And as their father turned off the driveway and onto the road, they waved and he tooted his horn as a last good-bye.

While Jack and Chip had dinner in a diner down the road, Chip said, “Hey, I just thought of something. We could hitchhike to Key West! Dad said it was only twenty miles.”

“What if we ran into Dad down there?” Jack de-

manded. "That would be just great." He paused for a moment. "Then again, maybe we wouldn't run into him."

Back at the motel, Jack and Chip brought Blaze inside and fed him the food they had gotten for him at the diner. While the boys were getting ready for bed, Blaze lay down on a rug near the door.

The boys didn't fall asleep right away. It was very hot in the motel room.

"I wonder," Chip said, "if that big guy really blew up that airplane."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"He sure—"

"Come on, Chip. Let's go to sleep. I'm tired."

"I'm not keeping you up. It's the heat. Boy, this sure is the tropics."

"*Good night,*" Jack said firmly.

"Okay. Go on to sleep."

It seemed like the middle of the night when they were awakened by Blaze's growl. Their room was completely dark. Chip sat up in bed.

"Quiet, Blaze," he hissed.

“Footsteps!” Jack whispered, sitting up in bed, too.
“It sounds like somebody is sneaking around outside.”

They heard a voice, muffled, the words unclear.

“The big man!” Chip whispered. “Didn’t that sound like him. . . ?”

3

Whispering Johnson

“Be quiet, Chip.”

Chip didn’t say another word, but Blaze growled again.

“Blaze!” Jack scolded. “Stop it! No growling! No!”

The dark room was silent. The boys were tense in the darkness, waiting, perspiring.

“Maybe the guy—” Chip began.

“Shhh,” Jack cautioned, for the footsteps had started again. “They’re not outside. They’re in the room right next to ours. Shhh. Just be quiet!”

When no further sound came from the room adjacent to theirs, Jack got out of bed, moved carefully through

the darkness, and put his ear to the wall. This wasn't necessary, however, for the next words were spoken in anger. A hoarse voice said loudly and clearly, "It must be buried at night!"

Startled, Jack stepped back, tripping over Blaze. Then he bumped into Chip who grabbed him to keep him from falling. The boys stood motionless, each holding the other.

They let go of each other when Blaze growled—a deep, sustained growl.

Jack bent down and hissed at Blaze, "You want to give us away? Be quiet! *Quiet!*"

Out of the mingled murmur of voices and footsteps next door, only two more words came through distinctly, "Whispering Johnson." Then there was the sound of the door opening and closing. The men had gone.

The boys remained motionless for a long moment. Chip was the first to snap into action. He switched on an overhead light. Jack lunged for the switch and switched off the light.

"Are you crazy?" Jack demanded. "You want them



to know that we think they are—”

“I want to get my clothes on,” his brother snapped. “Let go! We’re wasting time. We’ll lose their trail. Let go—”

They wrestled in the darkness—Jack holding on, Chip trying to break free. Blaze halted the wrestling match by barking. Both Jack and Chip turned to quiet him.

“What a good job you did,” Chip snapped at Jack. “Great! We had a chance to follow them—”

“Did you hear that hoarse voice? Did you hear what it said?”

“Something about burying something.”

“‘It must be buried at night,’ ” Jack repeated what the voice had said.

“Yeah,” Chip said. “That sounds like it.”

“That *is* it,” Jack declared emphatically. “I memorized it. And just before they left, did you hear one of them say, ‘Whispering Johnson?’”

“What about it? What we should have done was follow them.”

The boys climbed back into bed.

door, started wagging his tail. "You woke us up last night. Nobody can get by you. You're a great watchdog."

"I wonder if they're asleep," Jack mused. "Maybe they didn't come back last night."

"Yeah. Maybe now is the time to try getting in their room."

"Take it easy," Jack warned.

"You want to stall around again? Last night, you just let them walk out of here. And we had a swell chance to—" Chip glared at his brother hotly.

"Sure. Sure. We had a swell chance to get clobbered." Jack stood at the door, holding the doorknob. "Because I'm older than you—"

"You're seventeen. So don't make it sound like you're twenty."

"All I'm trying to say, Chip, is that Dad expects me to keep you from sticking your neck out."

Chip bowed. "I thank you," he said. "I thank you, sir." He strode out the door.

Outside, a balmy breeze rustled the palm fronds. Blaze ran in a zigzag line, exploring the lawn.

"Look at that blue sky," Chip said. "It's like the sky on a picture postcard."

But Jack didn't hear his brother. He was looking at the motel unit next to theirs as he strolled slowly by it. Venetian blinds, slats turned down, covered the two windows. Chip caught up with Jack.

"Are they there?" Jack said, keeping his voice low.

"Doesn't look as if they are." Chip looked around cautiously.

"There's no car. That's the clincher."

"How about us?" Chip demanded. "We don't have a car. And we're here."

Jack ignored that remark. He walked out on the lawn, pretending to be watching Blaze. Actually, he was surreptitiously studying the motel.

When Chip came over to him, Jack said, "We've got to figure out some way of getting in there."

"You won't make it. You're too worried about getting clobbered."

"Have you got any ideas? Ideas that make sense?" Jack paused. "Oh, I just thought of something."

Without further explanation, he headed toward the

motel office. Chip followed, taking his time. Blaze looked up, curiously. Then he obviously decided to stay on the lawn.

Frank Kelly—short and pudgy—was standing in the doorway of the motel office. His face was cast in an expression of skepticism. But his jovial voice contradicted his appearance.

"Don't tell me," he said. "You're Mr. Power's sons—Jack and Chip. I won't charge you for that information. You know, sometimes when you just get up, it's kind of hard to—to orient yourself, figure out who you are." He put out his hand and shook hands with the boys. "I'm Frank Kelly. Come in. Now that I've told you who I am and who you are, what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to see the telephone book," Jack said.

Kelly nodded, got the phone book, and turned it over to Jack. "Excuse me for not greeting you last night, boys, but my stomach wasn't behaving." He looked pained. "I didn't feel right. Naturally, I wanted you to get a good first impression of me. Who are you looking

up? Could I help you, Jack—or is it Chip?”

“I’m Jack. No thanks. I just wanted to skim through the phone book. I always like to do this when I come to a new town.”

“Too many characters in a phone book for my taste,” Kelly said, poker-faced. “Not enough plot.”

The boys laughed. Kelly looked slightly perplexed, as if he was wondering why they were laughing.

“It sure is quiet here,” Chip said, looking around.

“We get some pretty noisy trucks to go by, for the benefit of the guests who like it a little noisy.” He laughed heartily.

Jack smiled. “That’s not what my brother meant, Mr. Kelly. We don’t have any neighbors on either side of our place, do we?”

“Unit Three is filled.” He looked behind him at the numbered board with keys on it. “At least they haven’t checked out yet. Guests have until eleven, you know, to check out.”

Jack handed back the telephone book to Mr. Kelly, who crossed the room to put it away. As he bent down to slide it on the shelf of the telephone stand, Chip

moved over to the board and slipped the extra key to Unit 3 off its hook. Jack was astonished. He tried to grab the key. But he had to stop himself in mid-action, for Mr. Kelly was returning.

Quickly Jack said to Mr. Kelly, "I guess we'll have breakfast now."

The instant they left the motel office, Jack exploded. "Why in the world—"

"Well, you said you wanted to get in there," Chip interrupted. "How else can we—"

"All right, all right. Since you got the key, I guess we may as well use it. We have to act fast, though. Kelly might be in cahoots with the spies."

"Kelly?" Chip shook his head. "He's such a nice guy. Always out for a laugh."

"Maybe. Could be." Jack pondered a moment. "Then again, maybe all that good cheer of his is just a front."

They circled wide. They approached the door to Unit 3 from the side farthest away from the motel office. The plan was to knock. If someone answered they were going to say that they had come to clean up. If no one answered, Chip was to go in, while Jack

stayed outside the door as a lookout.

Chip rapped on the door.

When there was no answer, Jack said, "Knock again, just to make sure. But not so loud. Do you want Kelly to come running?"

"I won't knock at all," Chip decided.

He put the key in the lock and turned it. He slowly opened the door and went in.

The room was empty. The twin beds obviously hadn't been slept in. Everything was very orderly. It looked as if no one had even been in the room the night before.

Chip opened the door. "Hey!" he called in a whisper to Jack. "Come here!"

Jack was as surprised as Chip had been by the neatness of the room. He moved farther into the room. He looked around quickly.

"See what's in that closet," he ordered Chip. "Don't take too much time looking at any one thing. Maybe what we want—"

Both Jack and Chip turned at the sound of the front door opening.

Mr. Kelly stood grim and silent in the doorway.

4

A New Friend

“What are you two doing in here?” Mr. Kelly demanded roughly.

“What are we doing in here?” Chip repeated nervously, stalling for time.

Jack’s forehead was furrowed. He chewed on his lower lip, trying desperately to think of something to say.

At that moment Blaze came through the open door and went directly to the boys. Sensing the tension in the room, he immediately whirled about and started barking at Kelly.

Both Jack and Chip talked to Blaze. Finally they got

him to stop barking at the man.

The motel room seemed too quiet, ominously quiet. Kelly stood motionless, waiting for an explanation.

"Oh," Jack said. Then he turned to Chip. "You've got the key we found outside, haven't you, Chip?"

Chip hesitated. Then he said quickly, "Sure. Sure thing." He dug in his pocket for the key. Then he turned the key over to Jack.

"We knew it belonged in here," Jack continued slowly, thoughtfully, making up the story as he went along. "It had the number on it. That's how we knew."

Kelly grunted and nodded. It was plain he didn't believe a word of what Jack was saying.

"We didn't want to bother you," Chip said.

"Of course not," Kelly said.

Jack handed Kelly the key. "We knocked first," he said. "When there wasn't any answer, we thought we'd just bring the key in here and leave it in here."

Kelly thought for a moment. Then he smiled. "That was perfectly all right. Doesn't look like our guests were in last night, does it?"

Jack glanced at the beds. He was still uncomfortable.

"Guess they weren't," he mumbled.

"How about having breakfast with me?" Kelly invited. "I make a darn good flapjack."

"Thanks," Chip said, forcing a smile. "But we'll buy some stuff—or go to the diner."

"The diner!" Kelly's eyebrows shot up. "Why, it can't top my flapjacks."

"Probably not," Jack agreed.

"Okay, that settles it." He opened the door. "Why put inferior flapjacks inside you?" As they left, he added, "Real maple syrup to go with the ones I make. I had this couple from Vermont who stayed here a week and a half. Gave me a whole gallon of syrup as a gift. Made right up at their place in Vermont, it was."

Not once during breakfast did Mr. Kelly bring up the episode in Unit 3. But the boys were somewhat ill at ease.

Later, when they were outside, Kelly invited them to sit in the lawn chairs. "You've got to give those flapjacks a fighting chance to get digested," he said.

"I sure downed a lot of them," Jack said contentedly.

When the boys were seated, Kelly pointed out the

construction that was going on across the road. "They're putting up one of those showy motels," he explained. "Doing it in a big rush. Winter trade starts in November, you know. They want to be sure to catch all that business. It'll probably ruin me—a big, showy place like that."

"Isn't there anything you can do?" Jack asked.

Kelly shrugged. "I thought of fixing up this place. But I can't compete with the kind of money they've got—some financiers up in Chicago are behind it. I guess I'll just sit tight and ride this problem out. It's like the times when we get a hurricane down this way—the natives stay put and hope for the best. Which reminds me, Cleo seems to be doing all right."

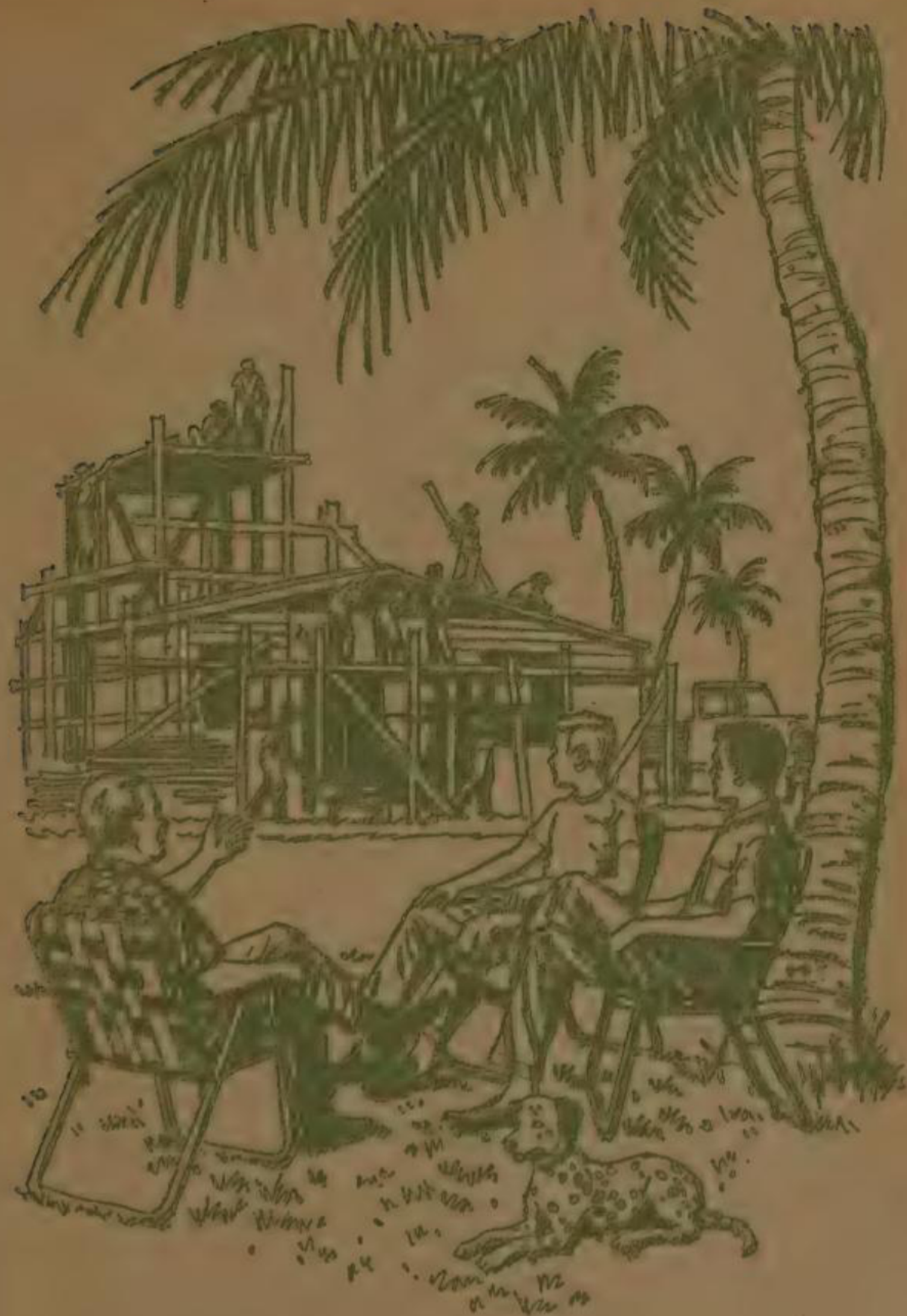
"Cleo?" Jack and Chip chorused.

"Haven't you heard of Cleo? She's the third hurricane of the present season. Moving right along."

"Is it going to—" Jack began.

"Hit the Keys? It's too soon to say, Jack. Hurricanes like to wander around. They keep you guessing."

After they talked some more, Mr. Kelly went with the boys to stake out Blaze.



"Your father was worried," he told the boys, "that you wouldn't have enough to do. This is your first day here. Go out and explore. Get the lay of the land, so to speak."

Chip waited until they'd crossed the road. "What do you think of Kelly?" he asked curiously.

"Seems like a great guy."

"Yeah, he *seems* like one," Chip muttered.

"What's got you bugged all of a sudden, Chip? Why, just a few hours ago you said exactly what I just said—that Kelly is a great guy."

"Just because he fed us pancakes. . . . I guess what's bothering me is the way he let us lie to him. He must have known what we were saying wasn't true."

"Could be," Jack admitted.

"You mean you're not sure he didn't catch on?" Chip gave a faint whistle. "Boy, was that a weak story! We find a key. We bring it inside. Kelly must have seen me looking in the clothes closet. What was I doing? Was I looking for a good place to put the key?"

"Okay, so he knows we told him a tall one," Jack agreed. "But he might have thought our being in Unit

Three wasn't really very serious."

"We could have been robbing the place, judging by the way it looked."

"You've got to remember," Jack reminded Chip, "that there are some grown-ups who can remember when they were kids. They can remember the kookie things they used to do."

"I don't know," Chip said slowly. "Maybe Kelly is okay. He could have clobbered us when he caught us. Instead, he feeds us."

"We'd better get some groceries. We don't want to be eating at that diner all the time."

"Blaze isn't going to like being tied up," Chip remarked.

"It was Blaze who gave us away," Jack said. "If he hadn't come up to the door, Kelly wouldn't have investigated."

On their way to the store, they met a boy in swimming trunks. He was carrying an oversized, empty basket. He had a deep tan, and his blond hair had been bleached white by the sun.

As Jack and Chip were about to pass the boy, Chip

asked him, "What's the basket for? Fish?"

The boy stopped. "It's for bones," he said. "Human bones."

"You're kidding," Chip said, looking closely at the boy.

"You want to come with me and see?"

"Did you say human bones?" Jack asked.

"I'm not saying I'll get some. I have to dive for them," the boy explained.

The boys went down to the water with the boy, whose name was Matt, they learned. He also told them he lived at a fishing camp in Blue Heron Key and that he was fifteen.

Matt put the basket down on the shore, and Jack and Chip rolled up their pants' legs. Then they all waded out into the water. Jack and Chip stopped after a few moments.

"Have you found any bones?" Jack asked.

Matt shook his head. "Some were found farther north. Ten thousand years old they're supposed to be. Bones of cavemen who once lived in Florida."

"And you're hoping you can find some around here,

is that it?" Chip looked at the boy in surprise.

"Well, why not?"

"You must be pretty sure you'll find them," Chip said. "I mean to"—he gestured toward the shore—"bring a basket. . . ."

Matt looked disgusted with Chip's skepticism. He dove into the water.

Jack and Chip waited and waited for Matt to come up. After a while they looked at one another in bewilderment.

"You think he's okay?" Chip said at last.

Before Jack had a chance to answer, Matt broke the surface of the water. He was sputtering and gasping for air.

The boys rushed to him, getting their pants wet. Matt laughed when they told him they'd been worried. He explained that staying down a long time was just a matter of practice.

"The old pearl divers, you know," he said, "didn't use scuba-diving stuff."

"Hey, that's cool," Chip said. "I'll have to try that."

Jack and Chip dove with Matt for a while, but they

didn't find any trace of bones.

They had decided to go when Matt took one last dive. Jack and Chip started wading back to the beach. They turned when they heard Matt yell. He was running toward them.

"Look what I found!" he yelled excitedly. He ran through the water, one arm extended before him.

5

Watch Your Step!

Jack and Chip looked eagerly at the five coins spread out in the palm of Matt's hand. The coins were irregularly shaped. Water had worn smooth their edges and erased some of the lettering. One had the number sixty-six on it and, above the sixty-six, there was the number eight. What looked like the word *gratia* was on another one.

"Man!" Chip exclaimed. "This looks like real buried-treasure stuff!"

"I just dove down," Matt explained, "like I've been doing, and there they were."

"When you yelled, I thought for sure you'd found one

of those bones. But this is a lot better." Chip rubbed his hands together and grinned. "Maybe there are bars of gold and jewels that pirates—"

"Will you keep quiet, Chip?" Jack snapped. He had taken one of the coins out of Matt's hand and was examining it. "I'd say these came off a wrecked ship—"

"But there isn't anything like a ship around them," Matt objected.

"You sure?"

"They were lying right there on the sand—all by themselves. It was like they were on display in a window."

After Matt had deposited the coins in the big basket, they went back to the area where the coins had been found. The boys did a lot of diving, but they didn't find any more coins or any evidence of a wrecked ship.

Chip shook his head in discouragement as they headed back to the beach. "I thought we'd run into a real gold mine. And I was feeling glad that we hadn't gone to Key West with Dad."

"Matt," Jack said, "this brother of mine is always dreaming. You know what I think? I think the move-

ment of the water just brought those coins—”

“From a wrecked ship?” Chip snapped. “You’re the one who’s dreaming. Why would the water bring only these five coins?”

“Don’t ask me,” Jack snapped back.

When they reached the big basket, Matt took out the coins. “I just thought of something,” he said. “Maybe somebody lost these. Somebody might have dropped them in the water and then couldn’t find them.”

“Do you think they’re valuable?” Chip asked. “You might get a reward—from the guy who lost them.”

Jack shook his head. “There’s a lot of that stuff around. Old ships were always piling up on the Keys.”

“They would run into a hurricane and wouldn’t know what hit ’em,” Matt added.

“I keep hearing about hurricanes,” Chip told Matt. “Have you heard about the latest one? What’s the name? Begins with a ‘c.’ ”

“Cleo,” Matt supplied.

“Oh, yeah.”

“The so-called experts around here are claiming Cleo is going to wallop us.”

On the way back to the motel, Matt told them about an old deserted Spanish fort. He thought they might find some interesting things there.

They stopped at the construction site opposite the Blue Heron Motel and watched the men working.

"Just like Kelly said," Chip observed. "They sure seem in one big rush."

They came to the construction office which was painted a fresh coat of battleship gray. Wet-paint signs were everywhere. There was also a large poster which announced a contest to find the best possible name for the motel.

"That's for me," Matt said, pointing to the poster. "The first prize is a fiber-glass outboard, a fifteen footer. They can keep the other prizes. I want that fifteen footer."

"Are you entering the contest?" Jack asked.

"I haven't thought up a name yet, but I'm going to."

"You couldn't pay me to get in on this," Chip declared. "We're staying across the street at the Blue Heron. The guy who runs it is okay. So why help this outfit put him out of business by figuring out a name

for them?" Chip glared at Matt.

"Are you asking me?" Matt said.

"Yeah," Chip said, a trace of anger in his voice, "I'm asking you."

"I already told you. I want that first prize, that boat."

"Let's go, Jack," Chip said.

Jack pulled Chip away. As they walked off, he mumbled, "I don't know why you had to get in a fight with him."

"You ought to know. You heard him." Chip raised his voice so that Matt would hear. "All he cares about is winning that boat."

"Somebody is going to win her!" Matt shouted after them. "What's the difference if I'm the one!"

Chip turned. "Well, good luck to you!" he yelled.

"Man," Jack said, "talk about fighting over nothing."

"What do you mean, nothing? You heard me tell him about Kelly and that this new motel was going to wreck his business."

Jack nodded. "Sure. But put yourself in Matt's place, Chip. If you wanted that boat, the way he does, you'd make excuses for yourself. You'd say just the way he

did that somebody's going to win the boat and that you might as well be the one."

Chip didn't answer his brother. He lapsed into a sullen silence, wanting Jack to think that he was also angry at him.

While they were in the supermarket buying a supply of groceries, Jack suddenly said, "Talk, will you! Stop acting like a zombie."

Chip shrugged. "I'm talking."

"Give me whole sentences. Not just a word at a time."

"Okay." Then realizing he had just used one word, he added, "Okay, I will."

They each carried two big grocery bags back to the motel.

After opening the front door, the boys went straight across the living room. They were eager to put the heavy bags on the counter of the kitchenette.

Jack started unpacking the groceries.

"What's that?" Chip asked after a moment, walking off.

Without bothering to turn his head, Jack said, "What are you talking about?"

When Chip didn't answer right away, Jack turned. He saw Chip standing near the front door with a sheet of paper.

"Look at this!" Chip said, rushing across the room to his brother.

Jack took the paper. **WATCH YOUR STEP!** The warning had been written with a soft lead pencil. The heavy black letters were very large. Although they were easy to read, they hadn't been printed with much care.

"Boy, oh, boy!" Jack exclaimed.

"We didn't see this before because of all those groceries we were carrying. We walked right over it." Chip moved quickly across the room. He placed his ear against the wall. "I don't hear anybody. They don't seem to be back yet."

"But why would they warn us?" Jack asked, walking into the living room. "You act like they know we were in their place."

"What if Kelly told them?" Chip suggested.

"I thought we had decided Kelly could do no wrong. You were fighting with Matt because—"

"I know why I was fighting with him," Chip snapped.

Jack smiled. "Matt had a motive for writing this thing, all right. I wonder when he had time to bring it over. 'Watch your step!' " he read aloud. "How corny can you get?"

"It puts across its message, though. Shakespeare couldn't have done it any better. Right?"

"You know what's bothering me?"

"The note," Chip said. "What else?"

"How are we going to obey it?" Jack asked curiously.

"Just by doing what it says."

"And it says for us to watch our step." Jack ran his hand nervously over his short-clipped red hair. "I don't know what we're not supposed to do. It doesn't even give us a hint. Anything we do might be the wrong thing."

"Sometimes people who write notes like this aren't all there. You know." Chip tapped his head with a finger. "Kind of a kook."

"Right." Jack paced around the room. He stopped abruptly. "To be on the safe side—if we're dealing with someone like that—we would have to lock ourselves

up in here and not move at all.”

“And for all you know,” Chip said, “this nutty guy might not go for that, either. It might just make him angry—and *really* out to get us.”

6

Digging

"Chip," Jack said, suddenly tensing.

"What's the matter?" Chip asked.

Jack didn't answer. He remained motionless, his head cocked. He was obviously listening for something. "I haven't heard Blaze since we got back," he said finally. "When you were talking about this guy being out to get us, I thought that he might hurt Blaze. To get even with us."

"Hey," Chip cried, his eyes widening as the awful possibility dawned on him. Then he lunged for the door. "Let's go!"

Blaze was gone! This was their first observation when

they reached the rear of the motel. Lines of sunlight cut through the shade of the solitary palm tree. Then Jack and Chip realized that Blaze's black-spotted coat blended with the sun-dappled shade. It was a perfect camouflage.

They stood looking at Blaze. He had gone to the end of his chain to take full advantage of the shade. He was asleep.

"That sure gave me a scare," Chip said. "I felt kind of guilty leaving Blaze all tied up—then going off."

"Well, I didn't feel guilty," Jack retorted. "I was a little sore at the hound. I mean, the way he gave us away. Kelly would never have found us in Unit Three if it hadn't been for Blaze."

The boys had just started back to their room when they heard Kelly's voice behind them. "How you doing?" he called out.

Jack put his hand in his pocket where he had put the warning note. Chip noticed this. He, too, was reminded of the note by Kelly's greeting.

"We're doing okay," Jack said.

Chip nodded. "Sure."

"What's wrong?" Kelly said, looking from one boy to the other. "Anything wrong? I never had any children of my own, but when it comes to sensing kids in trouble I'm a whiz."

The boys protested that there was nothing wrong.

"Well, that's good," Kelly said. "Your father will be expecting to find you in one piece. That would be two pieces between the two of you. It'd be a shame if I had to turn over, let's say, four or eight pieces to him."

Laughing, the boys agreed. As soon as they got back to their room, they went into a huddle. Kelly was definitely a nice guy and hadn't left the note, they decided.

"The big question," Jack said, "is who did leave it."

"Maybe whoever wrote the note had somebody deliver it for him," Chip suggested. "And this guy who delivered it put it under the wrong door. Or maybe he had the right numbered door, but the wrong motel."

"Now, Chip," Jack complained, "there's no end to the stuff you can come up with. I mean, if you start off every time by saying 'maybe.'"

"Okay. You got any better ideas? Well. Have you?"

"Yeah. Let's whip up some lunch."

While they were waiting for the hot dogs under the broiler to get done, Chip said, "What do you say we tell Kelly? Better yet, how about turning the note over to the police?"

"I don't know." Jack looked dubious. "What if a nut is back of this, and we go to the cops? That might make this nut really blow up."

"So?" Chip demanded. "What of it? As long as the cops nab him."

"Yeah, that's just great," Jack said. "But what if he gets to us before the cops get to him?" He looked in at the hot dogs. "Let's eat. These things are beginning to get black."

While they ate, they decided against telling their father about the note. They were certain he'd take them to Key West if he knew what was going on.

Chip wondered at the possibility of never knowing what the whole affair was about. "Imagine," he finished, "going through your whole life and not knowing."

The boys settled down to consuming the buns filled with hot dogs and relish. They were silent; they each

seemed to be going over in their minds all that had happened since they had arrived at Miami's International Airport: the explosion of the plane, the sinister big man with the gun, the mysterious whispers next door to them, and, finally, the threatening note.

After they finished eating, Chip put the dishes in the sink.

"We could wash them," Jack said. "The note didn't say anything about washing dirty dishes."

"Let's go out," Chip suggested. "Nothing wrong in going out, is there?"

They didn't head in the direction they had taken that morning because Chip said he didn't feel like running into Matt again. "Matt and his basket for human bones," he scoffed. This time they wore swim trunks, remembering that swimming in their long pants hadn't been very satisfactory.

They cut down to the water from the Overseas Highway.

Suddenly Jack said, "Look at those birds!"

"Wow!" Chip exclaimed, hurrying to get a closer look at them.

Long-legged birds stood in the water, preening their outstretched, brilliant pink wings.

"What are they?" Chip asked curiously.

"Flamingos. They must be flamingos."

"Well, they're not robins or sparrows, that's for sure," Chip said.

Farther down the shore, a figure bent over a small outboard boat. All that they could see of the person was a deeply tanned back and almost-white blond hair.

"Isn't that Matt?" Jack said.

"Sure looks like him. What's he doing, following us?"

It turned out to be Matt. Jack asked him if the birds were flamingos.

"Aw, no," Matt replied. "They're spoonbills. See how their beaks end in what looks like a spoon?"

"I see that," Jack said patiently. "It's their pink color that made me think—"

"A hurricane a couple of years ago busted up all their nests. Over there," Matt pointed, "in the mangroves. But they came back. They made their nests right in the dead trees."

They went from talk of the spoonbills to talk of the motor in Matt's boat. It wasn't in very good shape, he said. Soon the boys were acting as though they had never quarreled.

"How about trying to make it to that Spanish fort?" Matt asked. "You know, the one I was telling you about."

Both Jack and Chip were eager to make the trip. They had a hard time getting the motor started, even though all three of them took turns with the starter. Finally, during Chip's try, the motor caught on. Matt pounced on the accelerator and the choke. He quickly had the motor running smoothly.

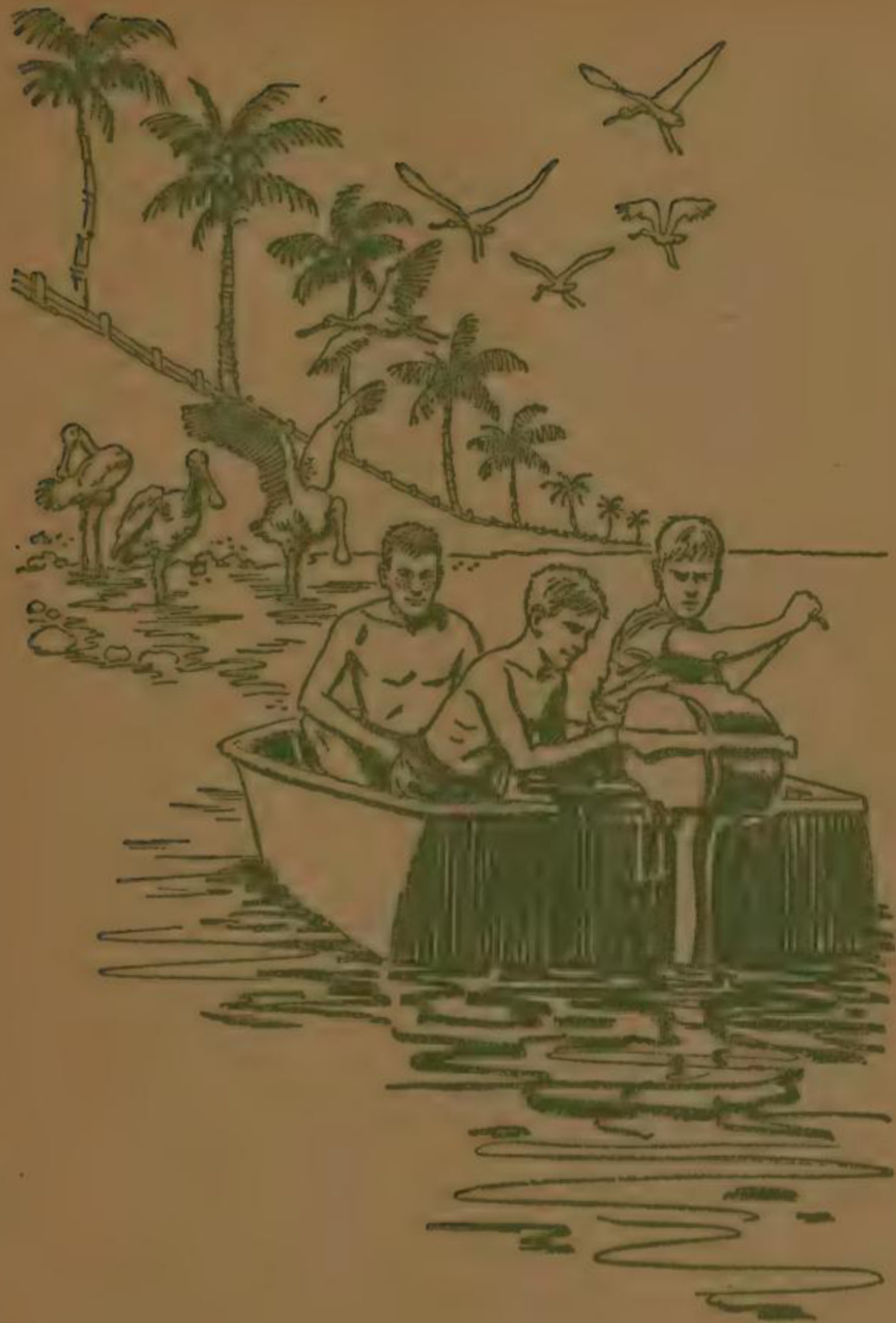
They headed north, keeping the shoreline in view.

After a few minutes, Matt pointed directly over the bow. "That is the fort ahead. You see her? That round mangrove island? Looks like we're going to reach it!"

Just then the motor sputtered, coughed a couple of times, and then conked out completely.

"It sounded like you're out of gas," Chip said.

Matt shook his head, grabbed the starter cord, and yanked. "There are a lot of shorts in the thing. That's



why it runs okay for a while and then, bang, it fizzles out. I never should have said we were getting there. Did you see how that jinxed it?"

The boys took turns again trying to start the motor. This time, however, they didn't have any luck.

Chip wiped sweat from his forehead. "What you need is a new boat."

"You can't say I didn't come prepared," Matt said, producing a couple of oars from the bottom of the boat.

"Yeah," Chip said with a smile. "And you also brought us along. Now I know why."

"We'd better head back," Matt said. "This is going to be slow."

Matt was right. They paddled for a long while without making much headway. By the time they came in sight of Blue Heron Key, the white beach was the only thing visible in the darkness.

After they pulled the boat onto the shore, they could see the scattered lights of the island.

"Let's make a beeline for the motel," Jack said.

"We had better," Chip answered. "Dad's probably

there. He's going to start wondering why we're not around."

The shortcut they took brought the three boys to the rear of the new motel's construction site.

They came upon men digging, a single spotlight trained on them.

"They're sure putting in the overtime," Jack said. "And look at them dig. Must be important—what they're doing."

As they came closer, one of the men looked up from his digging. He stared in surprise.

"What's the matter with him?" Chip asked.

"You'd think we were ghosts or something," Matt said.

The boys stopped. Excitement spread from the man who had seen them to the other men. The boys couldn't move. They stood rooted to the spot, watching, as the men threw down their shovels and came toward them.

As the men drew closer, they spread out. It was clear to Jack, Chip, and Matt that the men didn't want any of them to get away. The men were angry. They were getting ready to grab them!

7

Night Visitor

The boys didn't even try to get away. They stood as though hypnotized and let the men grab them. In the dim light, the men were shadowy, indistinguishable.

"You've got no business here," one of the men growled.

"We cut across to get—" Chip began.

"You cut across private property!" a voice broke in on Chip. "That's what you did!"

"We didn't see any no-trespassing signs," Jack said.

"We just wanted to get home," Chip added.

Then Matt explained how the motor of his boat had conked out and that they were in a hurry to get home.

Finally one of the men laughed and said, "Maybe it was a mistake all around. No harm done, though." He continued by saying that he was very sorry about the whole thing. But he didn't sound as if he meant it.

"You know what?" Chip whispered after the boys were released. "That guy sounded like he just wanted us to forget everything that we saw."

"I bet we could sue them," Matt said, "for grabbing us that way."

"You mean just for scaring us?" Chip asked.

"I wasn't scared. Were you? But I might have been. And if I had a bad heart or something. . . ."

Jack didn't enter this discussion between Matt and Chip. It wasn't until they reached the highway that he said, "It's pretty plain if you ask me. Something illegal is going on over there."

"And how!" Chip exclaimed. "That's why that character decided to let us go. He thought we might raise a fuss."

"I'm sure he was sorry they had grabbed us," Matt said.

"You saw how he was buttering us up. He sure was

sorry," Chip muttered disgustedly.

"Chip!" Jack snapped his finger with sudden realization. "How did we forget it?"

"What?" Chip asked, startled.

"Those men in Unit Three. Remember? The one guy saying it had to be buried at night."

"They could have been burying something over there, couldn't they?" Chip exclaimed excitedly.

Before Jack and Chip continued, they explained to Matt what they were talking about.

"I'm for going back," Chip said, "and digging up what they buried. We could wait around till they left. Maybe they've already gone."

"We had better wait," Jack said.

"For what?" Chip asked impatiently.

"Why are you always in such a hurry, Chip, to stick your neck out? We can wait until tomorrow night. Why not? You're forgetting Dad might already be there."

"I don't see any light on at our place," Chip said, somewhat subdued.

"I'd better go," Matt said, moving away. "So long. I'll catch it at home, as it is."

Jack and Chip watched him walk off.

"I thought of something," Chip said. "Matt sure left the first chance he got. Did you notice? I guess he didn't want to go back, either, to where the men were digging."

"Ummm," Jack muttered absently. "We took it for granted that those guys in Unit Three were spies. Maybe they weren't."

"So? They still talked about burying something at night, didn't they?"

"True," Jack said. "I wonder what it was that they were talking about burying."

"Well, you didn't want to go and see," Chip reminded him.

"Forget it, will you? Matt's gone now. And Dad—Come on. Let's go see if Dad's back."

They came upon Mr. Kelly sitting on the lawn in the darkness. Only a glow reached him from the colored lights focused on the palm trees.

"Got a message from your father," he told Jack and Chip. "He phoned for you. You weren't here, though, so he told me to tell you he had to stay in Key West

tonight. There was a banquet—I think he said—that he had to take pictures of. Sit down for a while and talk. Get some night air. Good for you. Won't hurt you a bit."

The boys begged off. They both had the same excuse: They were tired.

Chip dropped down on the bed as soon as they entered their motel room. "I wasn't kidding," he said. "I'm bushed."

Jack stood motionless in the middle of the room. "I was just thinking," he said. "Since Dad's not going to be back tonight, maybe we ought to go across the road and snoop around."

"*Now* you want to," Chip wailed, not budging from the bed. "All I had to do was say I was bushed."

Jack went on as if Chip hadn't spoken. "Of course," he said, "if they caught us this time it would be different—a lot different."

"You're telling me," Chip exclaimed.

"They'd know we were suspicious. They'd probably think, too, that we might be on to something."

Chip raised himself from the bed. "I wonder what they'd do to us," he said, intrigued by the possibilities.

"They wouldn't release us the way they did just now." Jack folded his arms across his chest. "Still," he said, nodding thoughtfully, "I think we ought to take the chance."

"I'm tired from all that paddling," Chip said.

"Don't forget I did some paddling, too."

Chip got up from the bed and started taking off his shirt. "You convinced me that we ought to wait until tomorrow. Now, all of a sudden—"

"Well, it's just that Dad's not coming home tonight changes things," Jack explained.

"Matt would be sore. I mean, his being left out of being caught and tortured."

"Very funny," Jack muttered.

"Seriously, Matt's under the impression that we're going to wait until tomorrow night—"

"Man!" Jack exploded angrily. "You're the greatest when it comes to figuring out reasons for not doing something you don't want to do."

"I don't know. I wouldn't say I'm the greatest."

Jack started undressing, too. "Okay, okay," he said. "Forget it."

"In all the excitement, you know what we did, Jack? We forgot all about that warning note."

"I didn't forget about it."

When they were in bed, Chip said into the darkness and silence of the room, "You don't have to be sore."

"I know I don't have to be," Jack answered. "I just want to. You see, I can be funny, too."

Chip didn't react to that. After awhile, Jack asked Chip if he was awake.

"No," Chip said. "I'm asleep because I don't want to hear any more of your jokes."

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry I flipped. Get some sleep, Chip. I know I want to."

Chip awakened. He knew that he had been asleep only for a short time, but now he was wide awake. Darkness filled the room. He listened closely to a strange sound in the room. At first he thought it might be a mouse. Suddenly he realized that someone was at the door.

Could it be his father? Might he have changed his mind about coming that night?

Maybe it was the man who had written that warning note.

Or was it one of the men from across the road who had grabbed them?

"Jack," Chip said into the darkness. "Jack. . . ." There was no answer. Jack, Chip thought, must be sound asleep.

The door was opening now. An unoiled hinge squealed.

Chip sat up in bed, waiting for the man to come in. The hinge squealed again as the door closed. The man was definitely inside the room now.

Careful, slow footsteps started across the floor. They headed for the bed.

"Stop!" Chip cried out. "Stop or I'll shoot!"

"Chip!" Jack yelled.

"It's you! Where have you been? What are you doing? I thought—"

"You scared me," Jack said as he switched on a lamp.

"Scared *you!*" Chip exclaimed.

"Sure. The way you yelled all of a sudden."

"Well, I'm glad I scared you."

Jack laughed and started taking off his clothes. "You thought I was a burglar. Come on, admit it."

"What did you do? Did you go across the road, after all?" Chip was curious.

"There is a night watchman over there. That's all

I found out. 'Stop or I'll shoot!' " Jack laughed again. "What would you have used for a gun if I'd have been a burglar? Your finger?"

"Turn off that light, will you?" Chip said irritably.

"Okay. I'll stop rubbing it in."

Chip flopped over on his side, turning away from the light. "Thanks. Thanks a lot."

Jack turned off the light and got into bed. After a while, he said, "When I came in, did you think I was the guy who wrote that warning note?"

"Let's go to sleep," Chip muttered.

Jack grunted and burrowed his head into the pillow.

"The least you could have done," Chip grumbled, "was tell me you were going out."

"You were sleeping. I figured it might be better if I went by myself. You'd probably have tried getting by that watchman. It's a good thing I didn't wake you. We'll have to dope out some trick we can use tomorrow night. You and Matt can maybe get the watchman to run you off—that will give me my chance. . . . Chip? Are you sleeping?"

There was just the sound of Chip's steady breathing.

Jack listened to it for a moment. Then he turned over on his side.

But Chip wasn't asleep. He waited patiently in the dark for his brother to fall asleep.

When Jack's breathing indicated sleep, Chip got out of bed—carefully, so as not to awaken Jack. He moved around the foot of the bed on tiptoe. For a moment he bent over Jack, preparing for what he was going to do.

As soon as he put his hands on Jack, even before he had a chance to shake him or call his name, Jack sprang up. "Wha', wha'!" he sputtered in alarm, half asleep.

"The spies!" Chip hissed, trying hard not to laugh. "Next door! They've come back!"

Jack quickly switched on a light near the bed.

Seeing the sleepy, startled look on Jack's face made Chip laugh. He couldn't hold back his laughter now.

Jack lifted his right fist and drew it back, expressing what he felt like doing to Chip. "Okay," he said. "Knock it off. Now we're even. Stop laughing!"

It was bright daylight the next morning when Jack called excitedly to Chip to wake up. He stood at the



front window, looking out. He was still wearing his pajamas.

At first Chip couldn't be coaxed from bed. He was sure that Jack's excitement was fake, that he was continuing the joke they'd started during the night. But when he finally came to the window Chip saw that something exciting must have happened across the road. Little groups of men were busily discussing something. People were walking from all directions toward the new motel site.

The boys pulled on swim trunks and hurried across the road. They soon found that a crowd circled the area where the workmen had been digging the night before.

"Will you please get back?" a newspaper photographer was pleading. "Some elbowroom, that's all I want. Please. That's it. You'll still be able to see."

"What's he taking pictures of?" Jack asked a man in the crowd.

The man shrugged.

A woman turned her head. Hair curlers showed from under a green kerchief. "Bones," she explained.

"A skeleton!" Chip gasped.

The woman nodded. Before she could say anything more, a fat man in a loud sport shirt, with a motif of leaping swordfish, shoved between her and the boys.

"Hey, Jack," Chip whispered, his eyes wide, "that must have been a body those guys were burying. No wonder they grabbed us."

"A murder!" Jack exclaimed, every bit as excited as Chip.

Another photographer started pushing his way through the crowd. To keep his camera from being smashed, he held it up high over his head.

Getting behind the photographer was Jack's idea. The boys let the man run interference for them.

"I don't know," Chip said hesitantly.

"What? What do you mean?"

"You want to see this? I'm not sure I do." Chip shuddered.

"Keep pushing, Chip. Be careful. You're going to let somebody get between us and him."

Jack, Chip, and the photographer finally burst out of the crowd like corks popping from a bottle.

There, on the ground, lay several large, brown-black objects.

"That's not the skeleton, is it?" Chip gasped, puzzled.

"Will you get back with the others?" the photographer snarled, making a pushing gesture with his hand.

"Are you going to take a picture of those things?" Chip asked innocently.

"Get back so I can."

"What are they?" Jack asked the photographer. "Pre-historic bones?"

"Yeah, yeah. Now, will you please get back?"

As the boys made their way through the crowd, Chip whispered loudly to Jack, "I still don't get it!"

Jack waited until they were out of the crush of the crowd. Then he asked, "Did you hear what those people we just passed were talking about?"

"Yes," Chip answered thoughtfully.

"What a great scientific discovery this is!" Jack exclaimed. "Dinosaur bones—and in Florida."

"It made me think of Matt—and that bone-basket of his," Chip mused. "Well, it isn't a murder, anyhow, the way we were thinking."

"No, not a murder. But a crime," Jack said firmly.

"A crime? I don't—" Chip looked bewildered.

"Right. A crime. And, Chip, I'll bet it's a juicy one, too."

9

Helping Kelly

Having made his pronouncement, Jack strode off.

"Where you going?" Chip called out as he hurried to catch up with his brother.

"Come on, if you're coming," Jack said impatiently. "Let's not waste a lot of time."

Chip caught up with Jack as he waited at the highway.

"You're going to tell Kelly, aren't you?" Chip demanded.

"That's a brilliant deduction, Chip. All you had to work with was the observation that I'm heading right for his office." The last car passed by. "Come on,

before we're held up any longer."

They found Mr. Kelly in the bathroom of one of the motel units. He was working a plunger, trying to unstop the lavatory.

"Facial tissues down the drain," he said, scowling. "It happens all the time."

"Mr. Kelly—" Jack began.

"See that wastebasket?" Kelly pointed with the dripping plunger. "Read what it says on it, Chip. Go ahead."

"'Please deposit facial tissues here and not in the lavatory,'" Chip read. "'Thank you. The management.'"

"That's what I thought it said." Mr. Kelly nodded, enjoying his own sarcasm.

Jack tried again, unsuccessfully, to break in on him.

"Maybe it's just women," Kelly said, "who can't read it. Maybe—"

"Jack," Chip shouted at Kelly, "wants to report a crime!"

The outburst left Kelly momentarily stunned—and silent.

"It happened across the road," Jack added quickly,

taking advantage of Kelly's silence.

"I noticed something going on over there," Kelly said. "I thought of inquiring."

"Mr. Kelly—" Jack began.

"Then I told myself I might do better unplugging a few sinks."

"They grabbed us last night over there," Chip offered. "That's how we—"

"Grabbed you!" Kelly exclaimed.

"That's how we know about the dinosaur bones," Chip finished.

"What!" Kelly was flabbergasted. "Dinosaur bones!"

"Please, Mr. Kelly," Jack begged. "Would you please let me tell you the whole thing from the beginning?"

"Go ahead," Kelly mumbled. "If this were April first, I'd think this was just one big gag. Go ahead. Let me hear."

Jack told the man all that had happened since they were grabbed by the men who were digging across the highway. Chip supplied a detail now and then. Kelly was stunned into complete silence.

"I'm sure," Jack finished, "that it was those bones

that were buried last night. And this morning they were dug up. I'm sure that—"

A car's horn sounded outside. Steadily and insistently.

"Come on out, boys," Kelly said. "One of the guests probably wants to check out. Or he's got a plumbing problem. Running a motel—it's a hard life. . . ."

The boys stood in the driveway while Kelly talked to the people in the car which was parked in front of the office.

"You didn't tell him," Chip reminded his brother, "about those two guys we heard the night we moved in. And what about that threatening note?"

"Why should I tell him all that?" Jack replied. "Isn't this whole thing complicated enough already?"

"You said they buried the bones—"

"Sure. What else? That's what they must have been doing, Chip."

"Yeah. That's what I think," Chip agreed. "But what I don't understand is why they buried the bones. They must have known they were going to dig them up again in a little while."

The car in front of the office drove off just then. Instead of answering Chip, Jack started walking toward Kelly. Chip followed. But Kelly was heading toward the motel under construction across the road. It was plain, by the steady rhythm of his walk, that he was angry. And he seemed oblivious to everything but his objective.

Jack and Chip ran toward him, taking a shortcut across the lawn. When they caught up with him, the boys just trailed along, not saying anything. They could see he wasn't in any mood for conversation.

Mr. Kelly went straight to the freshly painted construction office. When he entered, the boys followed right behind him.

"Disbareaux!" Kelly called out to a man sitting in a swivel chair.

An attractive girl, obviously the man's secretary, came rushing forward. "Have you an appointment?" she asked, her blue eyes big with alarm.

Kelly pushed by her and over to where Disbareaux still remained seated. Disbareaux was as handsome as his secretary was pretty. He leaned back in his swivel

chair, then rocked gently as though he were at peace with the world.

Kelly shook a finger at him. "I know what you're up to, Disbareaux. You're not fooling me. This whole thing—"

"Sit down, Kelly." Disbareaux spoke softly, but the authority in his voice silenced Kelly. "Come on, boys," he said to Jack and Chip, "have a seat. Claire," he called to his secretary, "another chair. We need another chair."

Kelly grumbled and scowled, but he sat down. When another chair had been brought and the boys were also seated, Disbareaux said, "These young men, Kelly—my first thought was that they were your bodyguards. Next, it occurred to me that they were your attorneys. But, of course—"

"You get your attorneys!" Kelly cried angrily. "You'll be needing them. This is a big hoax, Disbareaux. You got yourself some bones. You dug them up like they're genuine dinosaur bones. And all for publicity for this motel of yours."

Disbareaux rocked forward. The amusement that had been in his eyes was gone now. "That's a serious charge,"

he said. "That's a *very* serious charge."

"And it's one I'm going to make stick," Kelly shot back at him.

"Kelly," Disbareaux said calmly, "I'm going to tell you something that's going to surprise you."

Kelly shook his head. "Oh, no. Anything *you* say won't surprise me."

"If those bones," Disbareaux went on, ignoring what Kelly had said, "are not genuine, I want them exposed as frauds."

"You don't mean that," Kelly declared.

"These boys are your witnesses to what I've said." Disbareaux slammed a fist into the palm of his hand. "If this unparalleled scientific discovery isn't—"

"Mr. Disbareaux," Chip interrupted.

"Yes?"

"It seems to me," Chip went on hurriedly, "that if you got some scientists down here, they could tell pretty fast if the bones were real or—you know—fake."

"Excellent idea," Disbareaux said.

"There are some anthropologists in Florida now," Jack said.

"Wonderful!" Disbareaux exclaimed.

Kelly's head was moving back and forth from one speaker to the other as though he were watching a fast tennis match. He had a bewildered look on his face.

"These scientists," Jack went on, "are studying human bones found off the west coast of Florida."

"All the better." Disbareaux's black eyes were shining and eager. "Identifying these bones would be a snap for them. This is precisely their field."

Quickly and decisively, Disbareaux led Kelly and the boys to the outside door of the office. He shook hands with them. Helplessly, they permitted him to do so. "Fine," Disbareaux concluded. "I'll get right to work on this."

Outside Kelly shook his head dispiritedly. "We've walked right into a trap," he said. "I'm sure of it. That Disbareaux is one slick article."

"He did agree to our idea awfully fast," Jack admitted.

"Agree?" Kelly exclaimed loudly. "Why, he snapped it up."

"Golly," Chip said. "Those bones must be the real

McCoy and he knows it. I'm sorry, Mr. Kelly. If I hadn't—"

"It's not all your fault, Chip," Jack said. "I had to tell him what scientists to get. What a bright idea that was!"

"Don't go blaming yourselves, fellows," Kelly told the boys. "I'm the one who deserves the blame. Look how I came barging into his office. And before you knew it—who was in charge? Disbareaux. Did you notice that technique of his? No con man could do better. Oh, he's a sly one. And calm as a cucumber."

That afternoon, after the boys had eaten lunch, they discussed ways they could help Kelly, since they had contributed to his trouble.

"The publicity that Disbareaux is going to get," Jack said, "is sure to run Kelly out of business. You know what this so-called scientific discovery is going to do? It's going to put Disbareaux's motel on the map."

"Yeah," Chip snapped irritably. "We've said all this about ten times. The thing is, what are we going to do? I—I mean, to keep this from happening."

Pacing in circles, Chip was just going by the front window when a strangely familiar car pulled into the

driveway. Suddenly he realized that it was the car his father had rented.

The boys let out whoops and dashed outside. Immediately they shot questions at him. He held up his hands for them to quiet down.

"I didn't come to see you guys," Mr. Power said. He laughed. "What makes you think I'd want to do that? A story came over the wire service that some dinosaur bones were discovered here."

"Right there," Chip said, pointing. "Right across the road."

"Really? Well, that's convenient. You see, I've got to get pictures of those bones in a hurry and get back to Key West. My job down there is far from finished."

The boys went over to the motel site with their father. They didn't have any choice but to help him take the pictures.

When he had a chance Chip whispered to Jack that they ought to tell their father about Kelly because this was the kind of publicity that was going to help ruin him.

"Just be quiet," Jack told Chip. "Telling Dad won't

do any good. You know that."

Mr. Power wasn't satisfied with the shots he took of the bones. "Far too routine," he murmured unhappily. "They're shots of bones. So what? There's no drama to them. No human interest."

Jack and Chip exchanged glances.

"I've got a surprise for you," their father continued, smiling. "I thought I'd hold onto it until after I got my pictures and was ready to go. All right. Are you ready for the surprise? You may come back with me to Key West. Things aren't too rough there." He paused. "What's the matter? Don't you want to go? I expected jubilation and cheers, but not—"

"It's not that we don't want to go, Dad," Jack said uneasily.

"Well, Jack, that's certainly the impression you're giving me."

"Aw, no. No," Jack insisted. "It's just that we've made a friend."

"Yeah," Chip said. "A fellow named Matt. He lives in a fishing camp. He's got a boat."

"Fine," Mr. Power said happily, though he was

clearly disappointed. "It's okay with me if you stay. You've made a friend. That's fine."

The boys sensed their father's disappointment and they tried to console him. They told him that by sticking around they might be able to get a good picture of the dinosaur bones—one that wasn't routine, one that had human interest.

Mr. Power studied his sons for a long moment. His arms were folded across his chest. "I've a sneaking suspicion," he said, "that there is something you're not telling me. Is there?"

"We do have a friend here named Matt," Chip said defensively.

Jack nodded. "That's right, Dad."

"I don't doubt that," Mr. Power said. "Okay. I'm not going to give you the third degree. Keep your secrets. The only thing I want is a promise. You'll do your best to keep out of trouble, won't you?"

"Of course, Dad," Chip assured him.

"Why would we want to get into trouble?" Jack added.

They cut across the road to Mr. Power's rented car.

Just before they reached it, Mr. Power stopped. "You know something, fellows," he said, "I must confess that I'm worried now about leaving you here alone. My mistake was that I didn't take you down to Key West in the first place."

10

A Cry in the Darkness

Wearing only swim trunks, Jack and Chip went to the diner for a snack. They had hamburgers, root beer, and lime pie.

They were eating the pie when Matt entered the diner. He wanted to play the jukebox, he said.

But instead of playing the jukebox, he just sat on the stool next to them and spun a quarter on the counter, the quarter he had intended to spend on rock and roll.

"I got an idea," he said. "If you guys will come, I know how we can get out to the fort."

Chip shook his head.

"What's the matter?" Matt stuffed the quarter in his

pocket. "If you're worried about not getting back in time. . . . You're still planning, aren't you, to see what those guys were doing last night?"

The boys were surprised that Matt didn't know about the discovery of the dinosaur bones. When they finished their pie, they left the diner and stood outside in the bright sun telling Matt all that happened that morning at the motel construction site.

"So why stick around here?" Matt asked. "I told you I've got a swell idea on how we can get to the fort."

"The thing is, Matt," Chip said, "we ought to do something for Mr. Kelly." -

"What's bothering me— Hey, what are we doing standing here in the sun?" Jack asked.

"You started telling us what was bothering you," Matt persisted. -

Jack remained silent until they were walking on the shoulder of the road. "I don't know about you, Chip," he said, "but what Dad said before he left sounded kind of ominous. Some people, sometimes, know that something terrible is going to happen before it does. There are a lot of cases of it."

"You believe that?" Chip said in surprise.

"What are you acting so superior about? There might be something to premonition."

Chip shrugged. "Could be. But, anyhow, I don't think we ought to go off with Matt in his boat—"

"Why?" Jack interrupted. "You say you don't want to go because you want to help Mr. Kelly."

"That is why," Chip emphasized.

"You're sure you're not scared, Chip?"

"Of course not!"

"Okay, if you're not scared, how about going out in Matt's boat?"

"Now wait a minute, Jack. You're the one who said you were scared. Didn't he, Matt? You heard him say it."

"You didn't answer my question," Jack said, before Matt had a chance to say anything. "How about going out in the boat?"

"Why not? You're the one who's worried about premonitions—and all that stuff."

When they reached the boat, Matt told them his idea. He figured that if they took the motor out of the

boat and rowed, they would be sure to make it out to the fort.

"Sounds like a lot of work," Jack grumbled.

Chip grinned. "There he goes, Matt. He's trying to back out."

Jack shook his head. "You're not getting a rise out of me."

"It sure sounds like you're trying to back out."

"Stop it, you guys," Matt said. He was in the water now, with both hands under the outboard. "How about giving me some help?"

Once they started rowing, they made good time. Matt had installed oarlocks in the boat, and the rowing was much easier than the paddling they had done the day before. But today it was very hot. The water, reflecting the sun, stretched like a shiny, silver sheet all the way to the horizon.

The boys spent a lot of time swimming alongside the boat.

In sight of the fort, they stopped. This time, at Matt's suggestion, they tried to locate a pirate ship rumored to have been wrecked in that area by a hurricane. They

took turns diving and rowing the boat from spot to spot.

Before long, the water was reflecting a wild copper-and-green sunset.

"We better head back," Matt said anxiously. "It's getting dark."

The air seemed to be suddenly filled with the frantic, squeaky cries of the birds. They dove through the air as though jet-propelled, darting crazily into the mangrove thickets on the shore.

"What are they?" Jack asked Matt.

"Grackles—I think. They zoom in on those mangroves every night. Why the rush, I wonder. Just to get to sleep."

The color of the water changed with the change in the color of the sky. Dusk was coming fast. Two pelicans flew by, cumbersome silhouettes against the dying copper sunset.

Chip changed seats with Matt, taking his turn at the oars. They all agreed that they should have started back earlier.

"That premonition you were talking about," Matt

said. "This is a good spooky atmosphere for it. Am I right, Jack?"

"It's eerie," Jack agreed. "That's for sure."

Straining with the oars, Chip gasped, "Next time, Matt, leave the motor in. Anything is better than this. Have you noticed how we always get caught in the dark?"

"What do you mean 'always'?" Matt objected. "It only happened once—" He broke off abruptly, strangely.

Chip stopped rowing just as suddenly. "What's the matter?"

"Shhh," Jack said.

"Tell me!" Chip hissed.

"Do you hear it, Jack?" Matt asked.

"Sounds like a motor," Jack answered.

"But it's muffled," Matt said thoughtfully. "And they're running that boat without lights."

"Why are they doing that?" Chip asked cautiously, afraid of what the answer might be.

"We'd better keep quiet," Jack said hoarsely.

In the complete silence, the muffled throb of the motor was plain.

"Smugglers. . . ." Matt whispered.

"What about them?" Chip interrupted, not able to wait for Matt to continue.

"My father said that's what they used to do," Matt explained.

"What?"

"Muffle their motors. Run without lights. They often smuggled people into the United States that way. Dad said—"

"There it is!" Jack exclaimed in an excited whisper. "See it?"

"It doesn't have any lights at all," Matt observed.

"I see it!" Chip exclaimed softly. "Light gray. Right over there, isn't it?"

The boys peered into the darkness. Suddenly they could no longer see the boat.

"It just seemed to vanish," Jack said in amazement.

Chip and Matt agreed the boat had appeared to move toward the shore and then blend into a wall of mangroves.

"What do you think?" Matt said. "Could be the smugglers have their hideout there."

"Help!" The piercing cry knifed through the darkness.

The boys remained motionless long after the call for help was cut off.

Without a word, Chip picked up his oars. He started rowing as hard as he could toward the spot where the boat had vanished.

"Are you crazy?" Jack yelled at Chip.

Chip was too busy rowing to answer.

"Sounded like somebody was being murdered," Matt said in awe.

"What are we going to do against a gang of smugglers?" Jack wanted to know. "Chip has got to play the big hero coming to the rescue. You're not thinking, Chip. Golly, there are just three of us."

Chip stopped rowing. He was panting heavily. "My arms are falling off," he barely managed to gasp.

"Matt," Jack said, "I thought of something. Maybe they're not smugglers. Somebody being smuggled into

the country wouldn't be crying out for help."

"Right," Matt said.

"Let me row, Chip," Jack said. Chip stood up without a word. As they changed seats, Jack explained, "I want to approach those mangroves slowly. Now let's be quiet. Remember, no talking."

Jack rowed slowly and carefully through the darkness. The boys were excited. But there was nothing to do when they reached the mangroves.

They just sat in the boat and listened to the silence of the night. There was something silent and watchful, too, about the star-filled sky.

"I don't see any boat," Matt said finally.

"Even if it were here," Chip said, "you'd have to be a cat to see it. How did it vanish? That's what gets me."

"Not so loud," Jack ordered. "You're talking too loud."

Matt moved to the stern of the boat.

"What's with you?" Jack asked curiously.

"Just a minute. There," Matt said with satisfaction as he finished tying his handkerchief to a twig. He came back to his seat. "I tied my handkerchief at the

point where the boat disappeared. We can't look around now, but in the morning. . . ."

"Say, that's a neat idea," Chip approved. "That's cool."

"Streams cut through those mangroves," Matt explained. "Could be the boat went down one of them."

The next morning, because Chip insisted he couldn't possibly row again, the boys put the motor back in the boat. To everyone's surprise, the motor started up on the first try.

And when Matt spotted his handkerchief in the mangrove without too much trouble, Chip exclaimed, "Hey. Maybe this is our lucky day."

"You shouldn't have said that," Jack told Chip. "You probably put the jinx on us now for a month."

"Man," Chip said, "you are bugged. Yesterday it was premonitions. Today you're worried about being jinxed."

Matt steered the boat right to the point where he'd tied his handkerchief. He came up parallel to the shore and cut the motor.

"I don't see any of those streams you were talking

about," Jack observed, looking about him.

A solid, impenetrable jumble of mangroves confronted them.

Matt jerked his handkerchief off the twig in disgust. "The boat disappeared right here, didn't it? This has to be the spot."

"Yeah," Jack agreed. He was disappointed. "But a tractor couldn't get through this stuff, let alone a boat."

"We're sure a big help to whoever was yelling for help," Chip muttered sarcastically.

"Everything was going great until you had to say it was," Jack retorted.

"Are you saying it's my fault that the boat's not here?"

Jack suddenly forgot his argument with Chip. "Maybe whoever was on the boat got off," he said thoughtfully. "And someone took the boat on down the shore. That's where it's darkest. It's so dark there that we wouldn't have been able to see the boat."

They discussed the possibility of making it through the mangroves. Chip reminded his brother that he had said a tractor couldn't get through the dense growth.

The possibility of their running into snakes or panthers also came up.

"There are panthers in the Everglades," Matt said with authority, "but there aren't any here."

"How about snakes?" Chip asked dubiously.

Matt hesitated.

Before he could speak, Chip said hurriedly, "You don't know about snakes, do you? I'll bet there are plenty of them in there. If we'd brought Blaze, he'd be barking—"

"Okay, okay," Jack said, trying to quiet Chip. "And they are all deadly. And they are all going to bite us. So we better get going."

They made it back to Blue Heron Key in good time, even though on two occasions the motor came close to conking out. The trip seemed short because the boys were busy speculating about who it was that had called for help. They wondered, too, what they should do next.

"What do you think?" Matt said after they had pulled the boat onto the shore. "Should we report it to the police?"

"You know what I've been saying all along," Jack answered.

"I'm with Jack," Chip said. "The cops would just think we were crazy if we told them about boats disappearing in the night and about cries for help. They would say we were hearing things and that—"

Chip stopped. The three boys looked at each other in amazement and disbelief.

"Maybe we are hearing things," Jack said. "Do you hear a band? That's what I hear."

"Right," Matt said.

"That's what I hear," Chip chimed in. "A big, brass band."

It didn't take them long to find out that the music was real. As soon as they reached the Overseas Highway, they saw others, like themselves, drawn by the music and hurrying toward it. The music was coming from the motel construction site.

An even bigger crowd had gathered there than when the dinosaur bones had been discovered. The members of the band were in white and red costumes with red pompons on their hats.

"What gives?" Chip said. "Did they find the missing link this time?"

"No," a voice behind them said. "They've already found enough."

The boys turned. It was Mr. Kelly.

"What's the band for?" Matt asked. "Do you know?"

Kelly nodded, grimacing sourly.

"What's the matter with us?" Jack said. "It must be the scientists. Who else? They've arrived, haven't they?"

"Disbareaux didn't waste any time," Kelly said sadly. "And look at the show he's putting on."

"It's my fault, too," Jack said.

Chip objected. "It's as much mine as it is yours."

"Now look," Kelly said, "I don't want you two taking the blame for this. Understand?"

Both Jack and Chip nodded, but it was plain that they felt responsible for what had happened.

After a few moments Disbareaux appeared. He mounted an improvised platform and introduced himself. Then he went on to explain that he was privileged to introduce three eminent scientists who had come to examine the recently discovered bones.

One by one the scientists appeared and walked up the steps onto the platform. And each time one came up, Disbareaux introduced him to the crowd. Then a long table was placed on the platform.

Finally, the band—which had been quiet through this part of the ceremony—struck up the stirring “March Militaire.” The bones were then carried out by men in dress suits and placed on the table.

“What an entrance,” Kelly growled. “It’s a regular show he’s putting on.”

“And look at the photographers he’s got,” Jack observed.

“You know what they ought to be playing?” Chip grinned. “‘I’ve Got You Under My Skin.’ Because of the bones and—”

“You don’t have to explain it,” Jack complained. “Give us credit for having some intelligence.”

Suddenly the band stopped. It seemed very quiet now. A hush fell over the crowd as the three scientists went to work examining the bones.

One of the scientists was shaking his head, disagreeing about something.

"Wonder what that means," Jack said.

Kelly merely shrugged.

"Mr. Kelly must feel terrible," Chip whispered to Jack.

"I never saw him so quiet," Jack said. "He knows that if the verdict isn't in his favor, he's wrecked."

"And how are we going to feel? If it hadn't been for what we said. . . ."

"Shhh," Jack cautioned. "Here's Disbareaux with the verdict."

12

The Fabulous Mastodon

A murmur of voices rose as Disbareaux walked to the front of the platform to make his announcement.

Disbareaux quieted his audience by standing motionless, refusing to say anything until everyone was silent.

"Here it comes," Chip said.

"Look at him smile," Matt murmured. "The news, I'm afraid, is going to be bad."

"It would not be right—or proper," Disbareaux finally began, "for me to give you the decision that has been reached. It is with pleasure, therefore, that I again introduce to you one of the world's foremost paleontologists, Professor Derek Asquith."

As soon as the professor came forward, it was obvious that the microphone would have to be lowered. He wasn't more than five feet tall. He looked as if he was at least eighty years old. When he tried speaking without the microphone, people in the crowd complained they couldn't hear.

Disbareaux lowered the microphone and adjusted the volume.

Professor Asquith cleared his throat. Then he began again, insisting bones made a fascinating study. He compared them to the pieces of a puzzle.

"Is he going to get to the point," Kelly growled, "or isn't he?"

As the professor droned on and on, the crowd became restless. Aware of this, Disbareaux arose and walked up to the professor.

As he bent down, obviously to urge the professor to tell the crowd what it was they were waiting to hear, Chip yelled out, "Are these bones fakes?"

Everybody turned to stare at Chip.

"Pretend I'm not with you," Jack hissed at his brother angrily.

"The answer to that question," Disbareaux said, smiling broadly and looking out over the crowd, "is no. The verdict as to the authenticity of the bones is unanimous. Professor, will you please elaborate?"

While the professor was exclaiming over a femur, an upper leg bone, and saying that the bone was definitely from a mastodon, Kelly gestured for the boys to follow him. Matt stayed behind; he wanted to hear more about the bones, he said.

"I'm sorry about the way it turned out, Mr. Kelly," Jack said as they headed for the road.

Chip shrugged. "It was what we expected, Jack. You know that."

Jack didn't say anything, but he looked very disappointed.

"Now, I don't want you blaming yourselves," Kelly told the boys. "Come on to the diner, you two. Have some ice cream. It's going to be on me."

Kelly had a glass of root beer and the boys had sodas. Nothing was said at first.

"I know you're worried," Jack said at last.

"Oh? Oh, yes," Kelly sputtered, startled out of his

thoughts. "Now, Jack," he went on with some hesitancy, "how about you and your brother? I'm very worried about you. . . ."

"You're worried about *us*?" Jack said, puzzled.

Kelly wiped his mouth with a napkin. "Maybe I shouldn't have done it," he said. "That warning note. . . ."

Kelly hesitated again.

"How do you know about it?" Chip exploded. "We didn't tell you about it."

"Since I left the note, I should know about it," Kelly answered. "Shouldn't I? Now—now wait a minute before you jump all over me. I just wanted to keep you from getting in any trouble. Your father's away. I thought a little scare might keep you in line."

"Wow!" Chip exclaimed. "You sure had us fooled."

"And worried, too. I could see that. It disturbed me. I thought it was time I confessed. Those sodas were a bribe." Kelly laughed. "When I threw myself on your mercy, I wanted you to go easy on me."

"I can't get over how you had us fooled," Chip said.

"Now you can get in trouble, just like that." Kelly

snapped his fingers, a grin on his face. "You haven't got that threatening note hanging over your heads any more. I'm joking, of course."

Kelly rushed off then, saying he had work to do.

Later, Jack and Chip walked up the highway. "Remember when we weren't sure about Kelly?" Jack said. "We have been plain stupid. He's a swell character."

"We didn't do such a bad job, though, sizing up Disbarcaux," Chip reminded him.

"You want credit for that? You ought to be able to size him up blindfolded."

"And what he's going to do to Mr. Kelly's business makes him all the worse!"

"True," Jack agreed.

"Maybe Kelly should have given that warning note to Disbarcaux, instead of us," Chip suggested.

"I don't know," Jack muttered. "But something ought to be done about him."

They went to their room at the motel and brooded for the rest of the morning.

While they were having lunch, a heavy downpour

accompanied by sunshine, caused a rainbow. They went to the front window to look at it.

While they were at the window the rain stopped. The boys saw the workmen across the road rush back to what they had been doing when the rain started.

"I wonder what's on that poster," Jack mused. "Someone is putting one up. See him?"

"Sure, I see him," Chip answered.

Jack left the window. He came back with a pair of binoculars which he focused on the poster across the road.

"It's not raining now," Chip said. "We could go across and see what that poster—"

"Here." Jack shoved the binoculars at Chip. "Read it yourself. Disbareaux is calling the contest off. Boy, does that make me mad!"

Chip looked through the binoculars and read, "The motel-naming contest is off! The management is sorry if this inconveniences anyone. The recent archeological discovery has suggested a name to the management, which it feels cannot be topped. The motel is to be called **THE FABULOUS MASTODON.**" Chip lowered

the binoculars and turned to Jack. "You think that name is any good, Jack?" he asked.

"I don't care what they've named it," Jack growled. "What burns me up is the way they called off the contest. Matt's been figuring on winning that boat!"

"Yeah," Chip said. "He's going to go into a tailspin when he hears."

"They're sorry if it inconveniences anyone. I'll bet they're sorry. Disbareaux is going to put Mr. Kelly out of business. Now he's renegeing on this contest that Matt's been counting on to get that boat. . . ."

Jack put away the binoculars.

As he turned from the drawer, Chip started to say something, but Jack interrupted him. "Wait," he said, "I just thought of something. Those bones *must* be genuine. All those scientists said they are. But why were they buried and then unburied?"

"You tell me," Chip said. "That's what we don't know."

"Of course we don't." Jack was getting more excited by the minute. "But if we found why they were buried—"

"How are we going to find out?" Chip demanded.

"—we'd probably have some evidence"—Jack went right on, ignoring Chip's interruption—"that would make old Disbareaux squirm."

Chip nodded. "That's great. But I still say, how are we going to do it? Maybe if we sat here all day with the binoculars and looked—"

"You wouldn't be able to see into Disbareaux's office." Jack stopped his pacing around the room. With a dramatic flourish, he said, "And it's my hunch that that is where we have to look."

"You mean sneak in at night?" Chip exclaimed. "How about the watchman? You know there's a watchman."

"Sure, I know. I saw him."

"So?"

"Remember that idea, Chip, that I had before? By prowling around, you and Matt can lure the watchman away from the office and that will give me the chance—"

"To get clobbered," Chip finished.

"What are you talking about? Nobody is going to be in the office at night. What do you say, Chip, we go over there now and look around?"

Across the road, the boys strolled about near the office. The man who had put up the poster was carrying away the ladder.

While they were reading the poster for the second time—this time, close up—they saw Disbareaux's pretty secretary leave the office. They watched her as she walked down the road.

"Probably going to lunch," Jack observed.

"Maybe there's nobody in there now," Chip ventured.

"Chip, I hardly think—"

"It might be easier looking around in there now than it would be tonight."

Before Jack could stop him, Chip walked quickly to the office door. He opened it cautiously and looked in. He turned immediately. With an urgent waving of his hand, he gestured for Jack to follow him.

Jack looked about furtively. Men were on the other side of the office, busy around a pair of trailer trucks. Satisfied that the coast was clear, Jack rushed to the door excitedly.

13

An Angry Threat

"You'd better stay at the door," Jack told Chip breathlessly as soon as he entered the office.

"But it will be twice as fast if we both look," Chip objected.

"Stop arguing. We don't have time."

"All right. Go on. I'll yell if I see someone coming."

Jack found three desks in the rear of the office. High filing cabinets lined part of a wall. Where to look and how to go about it was a real problem.

Turning from the door, Chip whispered loudly, "You better hurry!"

To be doing something, Jack pulled out a drawer

in a filing cabinet. Manila folders, stuffed with correspondence, confronted him. There was no time to read letters. He shoved the drawer back and pulled out the drawer beneath it. More manila folders. More letters.

Jack quickly moved to the desks, when he heard Chip urging him to hurry. Of the three desks, the biggest and most important looking one, he decided, must be Disbareaux's. He picked up a memo pad off the big desk. The pad lay near the phone. Doodled on the pad, scrawled over and over again, were the words, "Building Inspector."

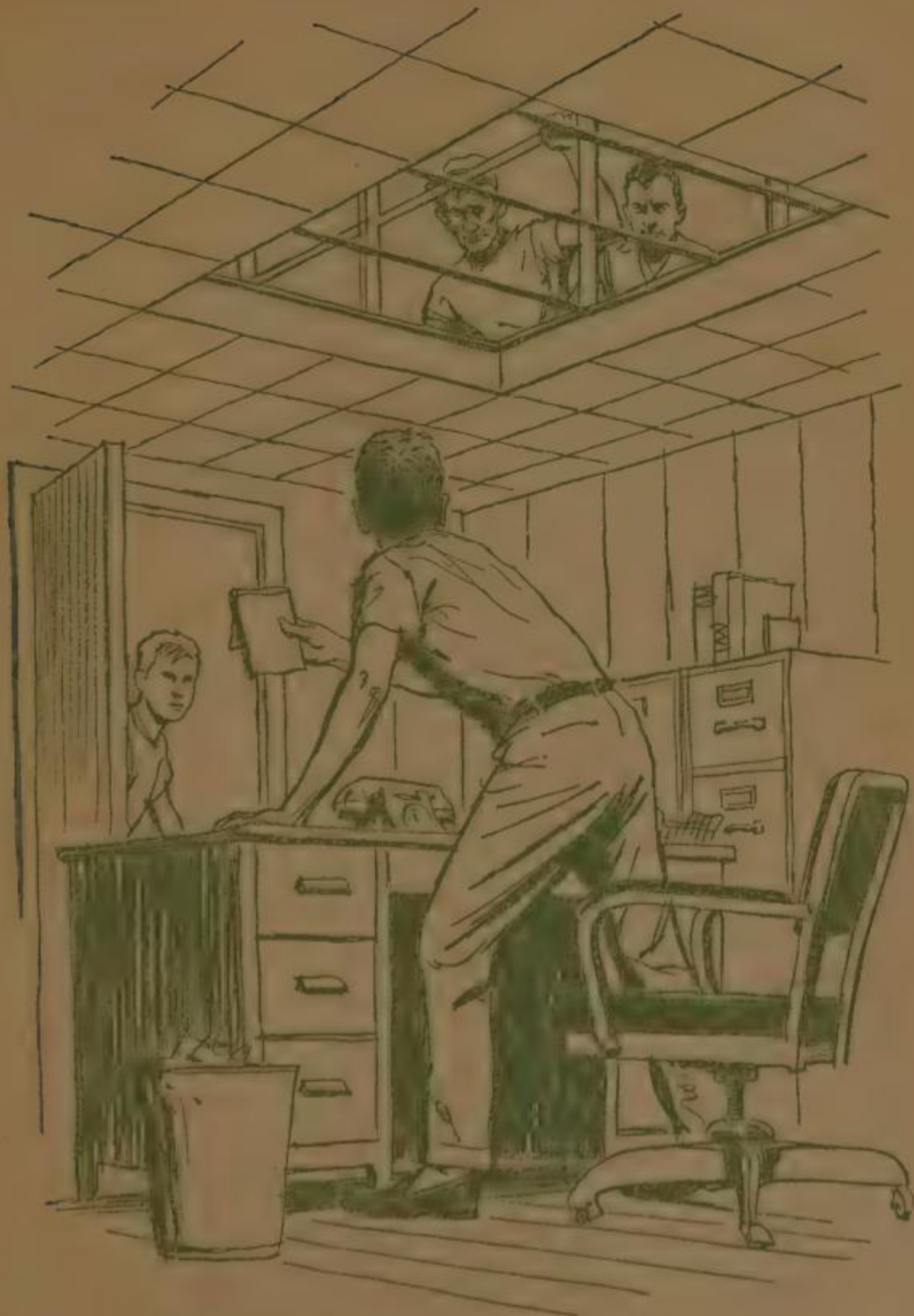
Something caused Jack to look up. Through a skylight, he saw two men staring down at him from a high structure.

Jack scooted for the front door. Chip was already standing just outside the door. He stood tensed, holding the door open for Jack.

Before Jack reached Chip, Disbareaux, who had entered the office from the rear, shouted, "Stop!"

Jack stopped dead in his tracks.

"Jack!" Chip yelled. "Jack! Come on!"



But the authority of Disbareaux's command held Jack motionless. He looked as if he were prepared to move toward Disbareaux or Chip, but unable to move toward either.

Disbareaux strode right to Jack. His hand shot out and grabbed the boy by the arm.

Chip moved quickly back into the office.

"What have you got there?" Disbareaux demanded.

Jack didn't know what he was talking about. Before he could ask, Disbareaux snatched a memo pad from Jack's hand. Jack had been in such a hurry that he had held onto the pad without realizing it.

Disbareaux looked at the doodling on the pad. His face paled. It was a long moment before he spoke. "What are you doing with this?" he asked menacingly.

"Let my brother go!" Chip ordered, pulling on Disbareaux's arm.

"Sure," Disbareaux said. "I'll let him go. I'll turn him right over to the police."

"Oh, yeah?" Chip challenged. "Well, we can give the police some information when they get here. We can tell them how you buried those famous bones the

night before all that happened—”

“We saw it all,” Jack broke in on Chip. “I wasn’t in here to steal anything, if that’s what you think. All I was trying to find out was why you buried those bones the way you did.”

“You’re mistaken,” Disbareaux said. Color had come back to his face. “You have misinterpreted what you saw.”

“Oh, no, we didn’t,” Chip said firmly.

“Oh, yes, you did.” Disbareaux laughed. Then he suddenly became serious. He slapped the memo pad against the side of his leg in a steady, menacing beat. “What do you say,” he said, “that we just forget this whole thing?”

Chip started to object, but Jack said, “Let’s go.” He took Chip by the arm and led him outside.

“Why did you back down?” Chip asked curiously.

“This isn’t like that warning note of Kelly’s,” Jack answered. “This is the real thing. He threatened us. We had the chance to go, and I wanted to have time to think.”

At that moment they noticed the incompleted structure from which the men had spotted Jack through the

skylight. Chip couldn't figure out what it was. Understanding came to Jack gradually. It was a huge figure. It was going to straddle the entrance to the motel.

"Hey, I get it," Jack said at last. "They're building a mastodon. You see the four big legs. And there's part of the head, completed already. It will go with the name that's been given to the place."

As they crossed the road to their own motel, Jack enumerated the facts they had to go on. Disbarcaux had done something crooked with the building inspector—probably to help speed up the construction of the motel. And the way he had threatened them proved they were right about the bones having been buried.

Their first decision, after returning to their room at the motel, was not to tell Kelly what had happened.

"If we told him," Chip said, "he'd be sure to think we went right off the beam as soon as we learned his warning note was a fake."

A knock sounded at the door.

"Jack," Chip whispered, "I just saw Kelly pass our window. That must be him at the door."

"Well, go on. Let him in."

"What's wrong, fellows?" Mr. Kelly asked as soon as he entered. "Anything wrong?"

The boys insisted vigorously that there wasn't. Kelly, however, regarded them suspiciously. After a few moments of conversation he got around to the purpose of his visit.

"I have to go to the bank," he said. "Something about my mortgage. Would you stay in the office? At the most, I shouldn't be gone more than two hours."

Without hesitating, both Jack and Chip agreed to help Kelly. As Kelly walked back with them to the office, he told them that there probably wouldn't be any rental inquiries.

"You see," he said, "I've got the no-vacancy sign up. That discovery across the road has brought the tourists in—and some business for me. It won't last, though. It's just a temporary thing."

Kelly was right. Jack and Chip just sat around the office with nothing to do. The phone didn't even ring.

Chip was standing at the door when he turned and said, "Hey, Jack, here comes a customer. They must not have seen the no-vacancy sign."

Jack came to the door. "Okay," he said to Chip. "So all we have to do is tell them that we're all filled up."

They watched as the light tan compact was parked in the drive just outside the office. A woman emerged from the car. She was tall and thin. She seemed too tall for such a small car. She had red hair.

"Look," Chip exclaimed, "a redhead."

"What of it," Jack snapped. "By this time you ought to know that I'm not the only person with red hair."

The woman hesitated. She was at the point of getting back in the car when she turned quickly, decisively, and marched up to the office.

"I'm sorry," Chip said as he opened the door. "You must not have seen the sign. We haven't any vacancies."

The woman had a handkerchief rolled up in her hand. She touched it to one side of her nose and then to the other, sniffing. Then, not having said a word, she lowered her head and started to cry.

Standing in the doorway, Jack and Chip looked questioningly at each other. The woman continued to cry. The boys didn't know what to do.

"I'm sorry," the woman said, lifting her head. Her red hair was disheveled. She was trying very hard to stop crying. "It's just that I'm—I'm so upset."

"Would you please come inside?" Jack asked.

The woman sat on the edge of the chair that Chip offered her. She squeezed the handkerchief that was still balled in her fist.

"I'm looking for my father," she said. "As you can see, I'm terribly worried about him."

"You think he's here?" Jack asked.

"I've been asking at motels about him. I've asked at every motel between yours and Circle Key. I hope he is here."

"We can see if he's registered," Chip said. "Can't we, Jack?"

Jack went to the guest register. The woman told him that her father's name was Malcolm Adams. Jack ran his finger down the long page of the book. His finger moved back up the page as he rechecked. Before he reached the top of the page, Jack started shaking his head.

"Maybe he checked in a day or so ago," Jack said, turning back a page. "I'll look and see."

"You would remember him if he was here," the woman said firmly. "He is taller than I am. Pure white hair. It's from Mother that I inherit my red hair. Hers was auburn, really. Father is the sort of person who would stick in your mind. He's very distinguished looking. He's—he's—" She lowered her head quickly, resting her forehead on the fist of one hand. She cried, unable to hold back a surge of emotion. Through her sobbing, she said, "I just feel that—that something

'dreadful has happened to him. I just know it."

The boys waited for her to stop crying. When she lifted her head, she was surprisingly composed. She told them that her sister and brother-in-law, with whom she was visiting, weren't at all worried. They said she was foolish for being so concerned. They were sure her father had gone off to stay at some motel. He had recently come to live with his daughter and son-in-law, and he was having a little difficulty adjusting to his new home.

"How long has he been gone?" Chip asked.

Before Miss Adams could answer, Jack said, "Excuse me. There is the possibility your father registered under another name. He may have done that to keep from being found. Would you wait just a moment while my brother and I check?"

Outside, Jack hurried Chip out of hearing distance of the motel office. "Chip," he said excitedly, "her father might be the guy we heard calling for help the night—" His face shone with excitement.

"How do you figure that?"

"Why, isn't it obvious?" Jack demanded. "Her father

has disappeared, hasn't he?"

"But—but why would anybody want to take an old guy out in a boat—and in the middle of the night, at that? I don't—" Chip broke off.

"Wait, just wait. Let me tell you the reason I got you out here." Jack spoke confidently.

"You told her you were going to check—"

Jack shook his head. "No, no. I thought you might be thinking the same thing I was—that her father was the man calling for help. I wanted to warn you before you spilled the beans. If she thought her father might have been out in a boat and yelling for help, it would really affect her."

When the boys returned to the office, Miss Adams told them how grateful she was for all that they had done. She invited them to see the roadside zoo in Circle Key, which was run by her sister and brother-in-law.

After she left, Chip said, "It's time for the news." He went to the radio and switched it on. "Maybe we will hear something about Malcolm Adams being found."

The radio news made no mention of an elderly man

who had been found. But a report from the Miami Beach weather bureau interested the boys.

"... Hurricane Cleo," the newscaster said, "with ninety-five-mile-an-hour winds has struck the north-east tip of Puerto Rico. The possibility that erratic Cleo may wander northward has put emergency crews to work at Cape Kennedy disengaging a Titan-two missile from its gantry tower. The first stage of a Delta rocket has also been dismantled. The real threat, however, is to the Florida Keys, as of now. The Keys have been warned to take all necessary precautions. . . ."

"Wow!" Chip exclaimed. "Another warning. That's the third in a row. There was Kelly's and Disbareaux's—"

"I didn't like the way the radio sounded." Jack interrupted. "That hurricane is going to hit the Keys. Really blast them."

"What about Miss Adams? This hurricane is—I mean, how is she going to find her father if the hurricane comes?"

"I'm thinking of Dad," Jack mused. "He had better get out of Key West. That is probably the worst spot in

all of Florida to be in right now."

The next morning the boys were awakened by the mournful sound of wind and the steady scrape of sand blown against the building. They looked out the window. The sky was gray instead of its usual blue.

"What gives?" Chip asked worriedly.

"This isn't Cleo," Jack said, "if that's what's bothering you."

"Oh, no? Maybe it's her kid sister, then, or—" Chip didn't finish.

"You heard what they said on the radio. Cleo hit Puerto Rico yesterday. Right? And she's traveling about eleven miles an hour. So how could she possibly be here now?"

"Yes, I know," Chip said. "And they also said they weren't sure what she was liable to do."

"Let's get outside. I want to get the feel of that wind."

They quickly put on swim trunks and ran outside. Chip looked up at the top of the swaying palm trees.

"Be careful of falling coconuts!" Jack yelled. "Hey, look what's going on across the road."

The replica of the mastodon had been completed. It

straddled the driveway of the motel entrance like a prehistoric colossus. Workmen were busily racing around it, trying to secure it in case Cleo struck the Keys.

Through the blowing sand, they saw Kelly calling to them from the motel office.

"Got a wire here for you," Kelly said as they came through the office door. "It's from your father."

Chip took the yellow envelope from Kelly. "I wonder if anything's wrong," he said.

Jack looked as worried as Chip.

"I've an idea how you can find out what that telegram says," Kelly told the boys with a straight face. "It'll keep you from worrying, too. Open up the envelope. It's a good idea to do that first. Next, take out the telegram. Then, if you can read, it's clear sailing after that."

15

Important Assignment

The boys didn't laugh at Kelly's joke. Chip clawed open the yellow envelope.

They both huddled eagerly over the wire as they read it.

"Is everything okay?" Kelly asked with concern.

"Here." Jack took the wire from Chip and handed it to Kelly. "You read it."

Kelly looked about for his reading glasses. Not finding them, he held the wire at arm's length to get the words in focus. "'Don't worry about Cleo,'" he read. "'Cleo might end up in the North Atlantic.'" Kelly nodded. "Your father's right about that." Then he went

on with the wire, " 'Have another assignment on pre-historic bones. Need picture story. Is there a story? Get pictures for me, Chip. Can't get away from Key West. See you soon as possible.' " Kelly shrugged and handed the telegram back to Jack. "Nothing in that wire to get upset about."

Kelly then asked the boys if they would watch the office for him again. "You wouldn't be able to get those pictures for your father now, would you?" he said. "The weather is pretty bad."

As soon as Kelly left, Jack said, "I didn't want to tell Mr. Kelly that some darn good pictures have been taken in terrible weather. You go ahead, Chip. See what you can get. Anything that comes up here I'm sure I can handle."

Chip didn't move.

"What are you staring at me for?" Jack demanded irritably.

"Why are you trying to get rid of me?"

"Get rid of you! Why, what did Dad ask you to do for him? Mr. Kelly doesn't think this is the time to take pictures, but you know better than that."

Chip still didn't budge. He continued to stare at Jack, who was now running his fingers nervously through his red hair.

"Okay, okay, I did want to get rid of you," Jack admitted. "I was afraid you would mess up what I'm going to do."

"I knew it," Chip exclaimed. "I could just tell you were—"

"Dad wants pictures," Jack broke in on Chip, "but he also wants a story." Jack went to the guest register and opened it. "He said as much in his wire."

"What are you looking in the book for? You couldn't find Adams in it yesterday. And, anyhow, what has Adams got to do with the story Dad's after?"

Jack turned the pages of the book. "I didn't say I was looking for Adams. I want to find out who was in Unit Three doing all that whispering about burying stuff at night. Here's the eighteenth, the day we came."

Chip went over to Jack and looked at the page over his brother's shoulder.

"'Clarence Siebert,'" Jack read the signature, pointing to it with his finger. "Siebert must be the guy who

rented Unit Three and never came back. Apparently, he used the room only for a meeting place. He had to tell—whoever it was who came to see him—about burying—”

“Whispering Johnson,” Chip said. “That must have been the name of the other guy. Probably he was the one with the real hoarse voice. That would be just the kind of name they would give somebody with a voice like that.”

Jack closed the register. “So we have their names,” he said. “What good is that going to do us? How is it going to help us figure out what this is all about?”

Chip suddenly brightened. “I’m going out. You said you didn’t need me.”

“Yeah,” Jack said warily. “I wanted you to go out and take pictures. Wait a minute.” Chip was already at the door. “What are you going to do?”

“If I told you,” Chip said, “you’d probably be sore.”

Jack moved fast. Chip scrambled to get out the door, but Jack grabbed him by the arm, with both hands. He held on firmly, though Chip tried hard to pull away.

“I’ll tell you what,” Chip said, still jerking his arm

to free it. "Let go of me, and I'll explain everything."

"What has holding your arm got to do with your talking? You can talk just as well—"

The phone rang. Jack still didn't let go of Chip. He insisted that Chip move to the phone with him. Chip agreed readily. Suddenly, as they moved together toward the phone, Chip jerked hard, broke Jack's hold, and raced for the door.

The phone continued to ring, but Jack ran after Chip. Chip had made it to the lawn by the time Jack got to the door, however. Jack felt that he ought to answer the telephone rather than go after Chip. After all, Kelly was depending on them to watch the office. The telephone stopped ringing, however. Still standing in the doorway, Jack shouted to Chip to come back. He noticed with surprise that the wind had died down to a balmy breeze.

Chip turned slightly, continued walking, and yelled, "I'm going to spring those names on Disbareaux!"

"You'd better not! Chip, he's dangerous!"

"Dad wants a story!" Chip shouted back. Then he turned and ran toward the highway.

"I knew Chip would mess this up," Jack grumbled to himself.

He stayed at the door, still undecided whether to go after Chip or remain in the office. The phone started ringing again; that decided the issue. He went to the phone. It was a TV serviceman, inquiring about taking down Mr. Kelly's aerial before Cleo arrived.

At that moment Kelly entered. Jack told the serviceman to wait just a minute, and he turned the call over to Kelly.

Jack waited for Kelly to finish, but Kelly went on talking and talking. As Jack started to leave, Kelly stopped only long enough to thank Jack for taking care of the office while he was away.

Jack dashed toward the office across the road. He was hoping that he wasn't too late, that Chip hadn't tangled with Disbareaux yet.

Jack was so intent on what he had to do that he didn't at first hear Matt and Chip, across the road, calling his name. When Jack heard them, he changed his course—but not his speed.

"What happened?" he shouted at Chip as he

approached the boys at a run.

"Calm down, will you?" Chip said.

"Calm down? When someone doesn't have enough sense—"

"I didn't even see him," Chip reported. "Disbareaux is not around. Are you satisfied?"

"Yeah, yeah," Jack said grudgingly. "And I learned a lesson, too. Next time I'm on to something, I'm not letting you in on it. I'd do better to tell Blaze."

"Great! Will you please let me change the subject?"

"Go ahead," Jack grumbled.

Chip told Jack that Matt had just learned about the contest's being called off. Jack only half listened, however. He had spotted the exhibition case at which Chip and Matt had been looking. It contained the mastodon bones.

Jack began to tell how impressed he was by the exhibit, which included a national magazine's account of the discovery, when he noticed Matt's downcast expression.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked Matt. "Being around Chip got you down?"

"I just told you!" Chip snapped. "He just found out what happened to the contest."

Jack and Chip then started talking about Miss Adams's invitation to go to the roadside zoo in Circle Key.

"You want to go, Matt?" Chip asked, obviously trying to cheer him up.

Matt shrugged. "Okay," he said halfheartedly.

"Now is our chance," Jack said. "If we're going to go, we'd better do it before Cleo gets here."

After a long wait, they found a ride on a pickup truck that took them all the way to Circle Key. It was such a small island—a few stores and houses—that they had no trouble finding the zoo.

The long, low building was decorated with animal pictures. Running across the front of the building was the sign, SIEBERT ZOO.

"Siebert!" Chip said, aghast.

"Why, that's the name of the mystery guy in Unit Three!" Jack said wonderingly.

Matt, still unhappy, was indifferent to their excitement.

"Of course," Chip cautioned, "this might not be

Clarence Siebert. You know that, don't you?"

Jack nodded. "I know. That just occurred to me."

They were approaching the entrance to the zoo when they heard a deep, hoarse voice speaking inside.

"It's him! It's him!" Chip cried.

Jack moved his hands in front of him in a quieting gesture. "Shhh, Chip! Don't go messing this up!"

16

Frantic Barking

Matt was suddenly intrigued. Jack and Chip walked a few steps away from the zoo with him and explained to him some of what had happened up to that point.

"Wow!" Matt exclaimed. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Probably," Jack said.

"Tell me," Chip urged. "Let me in on what you guys are thinking."

"It's pretty obvious—" Jack began.

"Not to me, it isn't."

"Chip, will you give me a chance to finish? After all, what other conclusions can you come to? Siebert—

the man in there—met Johnson secretly at Mr. Kelly's motel. He told Johnson that something had to be buried at night. And then what happens? Siebert's father-in-law disappears, vanishes."

"Hey," Chip said, amazed. "Hey. You mean the old man was the one they buried?"

"Chip," Jack said, "you catch on fast."

"That was the first thing that occurred to me," Matt said excitedly.

"Then you and Jack think that what we heard at the motel was a murder plot?" Chip asked.

"Right," Jack answered firmly.

Quickly Chip turned and headed for the zoo. Jack caught up with him and grabbed him.

"This is getting monotonous," Jack said. "I ought to let you go just once. Maybe if you were really frightened you would learn—"

"You mean you don't want to get a look at Siebert?" Chip said. "It would be useful to know what he looks like, wouldn't it?"

"If it didn't work both ways, yes," Jack answered. "But he would see us, too, remember."

"And once he spotted Jack's red hair," Matt put in, "he'd remember him!"

"He sure would," Jack agreed. "Especially since Siebert has a sister-in-law with red hair."

"Well, who's saying all three of us have to go in and stare at him?" Chip said. "All I wanted to do was get a peek at him. He wouldn't even have to see me."

"Shall we let him go in, Matt?" Jack questioned.

"It would be different," Matt said thoughtfully, "if Chip didn't suspect the guy of being a murderer. Since he does, it's going to be hard for him to act natural. Siebert's going to get suspicious. And if he is a murderer. . . ."

"But Chip is quick." Jack let go of Chip. "Go ahead, Chip. I won't stop you this time. Let's see what happens."

"What am I, a guinea pig?" Chip suddenly had become angry. "The way you sound, I'm like a guinea pig."

"So you changed your mind, huh?" Jack laughed shortly. "All you had to hear was Matt saying that if Siebert was a murderer—"

"I just don't like the whole idea of being a guinea pig," Chip insisted.

"Sure, Chip. Sure." Jack was grinning now. "Let's go back to the motel."

On the return trip, they didn't have the luck hitching rides that they had had before. They got two rides—both of them short.

Just as they reached the diner in Blue Heron Key, it started to rain. They ducked into the diner.

"I don't know which is worse," Chip said, "walking or rowing."

They sat down in a booth. Directly across from them on a stool was a short, heavysset man. He was wearing brown shorts, a T-shirt, and a white yachting cap.

The man turned on the stool. "See that rain?" He spoke across the diner to the boys. "That's just the way it rained before the big blow in '35."

Having made that statement, the man turned back to the counter and continued eating.

"It stopped raining," Chip observed suddenly. "And look, the sun is coming out."

The man must have heard Chip, for he turned from

his food again, long enough to say, "Don't let that fool you. This is real hurricane weather. And the right time of year for it, too."

"What's he trying to do," Jack whispered, "scare us?"

"What are we going to do about Siebert?" Chip said thoughtfully. "That's what I'm wondering."

"You sound like you want to arrest him," Jack remarked.

"Maybe not that, Jack, but—"

"But go to the police," Jack finished. "Tell them—what would you tell them? We don't have any evidence against Siebert. Besides, it's up to Miss Adams to go to the cops. I mean, if she wants to report her father missing."

Chip had been sitting with his legs stretched out to rest them. Suddenly he sat up, saying, "You're right, Jack. We don't have any evidence. This is just like when we heard that guy yell, 'Help!' There wasn't much then, either, that we could tell the cops."

Remembering how good the sodas were that Kelly had bought for them, the boys each ordered one. As they finished them, Matt suggested that they try again to

go to the fort. He looked at the boys hopefully.

Chip shook his head. "I quit rowing," he said. "Remember?"

The man at the counter turned on his stool again. "Believe me," he said, "I've been in a lot of hurricanes. And I'm telling you, now is not the time to make trips. You're liable to get caught in that dead calm just before the hurricane strikes. Nothing stirs. Nothing whatsoever. It's too late then to get back to land. The barometer dives down, down, down. . . ."

The man nodded agreement to all that he had said. Then he turned on his stool, away from the boys.

Outside, Jack said, "You realize we didn't say *one* word to that hurricane expert in there?"

"And he butted in," Matt observed, "every time that he said anything. Well, are we going out to the fort? You won't have to row, Chip, if that is worrying you. Dad got me a secondhand Whispering Johnson and it—"

"Wait a minute," Jack said, stopping suddenly. They had been moving toward the highway. Chip and Matt stopped, too. "Did you say you had a secondhand

Whispering Johnson?"

"Yes," Matt replied. "It's a secondhand one. But even secondhand, it's better than a lot of other motors."

Jack started laughing. "It's the name of a motor, Chip. Whispering Johnson. That's just the name of a motor."

"So we don't know who was with Siebert that night," Chip moaned.

Matt looked perplexed. "What are you guys talking about?"

"There must have been a boat with a Whispering Johnson motor," Jack said to Chip. "And they were going to use it to haul whatever they were going to bury."

"Oh, now I get it," Matt said. "You should have mentioned that name to me before. I could have told you it was a motor and not a guy." He paused. "Oh, there was something I wanted to tell you. Blaze was down on the beach, sniffing around."

"Are you sure it was Blaze?" Chip asked dubiously.

"Of course, I'm sure," Matt retorted.

"We had him tied up," Jack put in.

"Well, it was Blaze all right. I chased him. I told him to go home."

They ended up walking to Matt's boat without deciding whether they were going to the fort.

"I think we ought to check on Blaze," Chip said.

"Matt," Jack asked, "what's that tarp for up in the bow?"

"Covering my old motor. I figure it will do as a spare."

"I thought a Whispering Johnson was so great," Chip said. "Why do you need a spare?"

Matt and Jack hopped on Chip. They accused him of being frightened by what the man in the diner had said about hurricanes. Chip protested vehemently that he was ready to go out to the fort if they were.

Neither Jack nor Matt could back out after that. There was a stillness of water and air, however, that disturbed them all. The boys were unusually silent and thoughtful on the trip out to the mangrove island.

When they were pulling the boat onto the shore, Chip said, "We made it. At last we're really going to see the fort. Do you think there are any of those old

coins up here, Matt, like the ones you found?"

Chip didn't get an answer to his question, for at that moment Blaze squirmed out from under the tarp, wagging his tail, uncertainty in his eyes as to how he was going to be received. He bounded out of the boat onto the shore.

"Why, he must have been asleep under there," Jack said in amazement.

"I chased him away from the boat," Matt said. "He must have come back."

Chip bent over Blaze. "You're a stowaway, Blaze," Chip scolded. "You know what you get for that? You will be sent back."

"Don't worry, Blaze," Matt said. "We're seeing the fort first."

Chip's rebuke made Blaze cower. This didn't last long, however. The scent of something suddenly excited him. At first, he ran back and forth, sniffing. Then he ran off, nose to the ground, giving an occasional bark.

"What's got into him?" Jack asked in bewilderment.

"He's going in the wrong direction," Matt said. "The fort's over this way."

The boys headed toward the fort.

"Watch the sandspurs," Matt warned.

"What are sandspurs?" Chip asked.

"Get one in your foot and you'll know. They're sharp as needles," Matt replied.

"I think Blaze is coming back," Jack said. "Do you hear him?"

The boys looked off in the direction Blaze had gone. They waited as his barking drew nearer and louder.

"He must have decided he wants to see the fort," Chip said. "Or maybe he got one of those burrs—"

"Not burrs," Matt corrected Chip, "spurs."

But when Blaze arrived they all knew that something more serious than a painful paw was the cause of his frantic barking.

"He wants us to follow him," Jack said excitedly.

"That's for sure!" Chip exclaimed. He started to run after Blaze, then he stopped suddenly. "Why didn't one of you guys grab me? You think we ought to follow the hound? Maybe he spotted a panther or—or something like that."

"Didn't I tell you there aren't any panthers around?" Matt said.

"What if one swam here from the Everglades?" Chip asked. "You said there are panthers there."

"But whoever said a panther could swim?" Jack's grimace implied his brother was hopeless. "Come on! Let's go. Let's find out what's bothering Blaze."

The rough, deeply-grooved coral underfooting kept the boys from going very fast.

"I just hope we don't have to run back over this stuff," Chip commented. "I mean, if something chases us—"

Matt grinned. "You saw Blaze. *He* didn't have any

trouble running. And a panther could make even better time."

"You said there weren't any panthers," Chip reminded Matt.

"You said—" Matt began.

"It's in that mangrove," Jack interrupted, holding his arms out to keep Matt and Chip from moving.

The three boys waited, motionless. They saw Blaze, still barking, dart into the mangroves and out of sight. He came back in a moment and, looking their way, barked even more frantically. He seemed to be trying to tell them to come and see what he had found.

"Could be nothing but a mangrove squirrel," Matt said.

"Let's find out," Jack suggested.

Chip grumbled something about their having come to see the fort and that they should not be fooling around with Blaze.

Before they reached the mangroves, Blaze came running toward them. His tail drooped between his legs and he glanced back, frightened. A movement in the mangroves stopped the boys. They stood frozen, staring.

A figure stumbled forward. A tall man. His eyes were wild and dazed.

As the man staggered toward them, Blaze stayed close to the boys, whimpering.

"Mr. Adams!" Chip exclaimed.

Jack nodded. "Yeah. It must be him."

They rushed toward the man. Blaze started barking again, but Chip turned to him and ordered him to be quiet.

"Mr. Adams," Jack asked, "are you all right?"

The man didn't seem to hear Jack. His arms hung limp. His eyes stared sightlessly.

"Your daughter has been looking for you," Jack said.

"We'll take you to her," Chip added, "if you want us to."

The man remained silent.

"He's in shock," Jack whispered.

"It must be him," Chip said firmly. "Remember, Miss Adams said he was tall and white-haired."

Jack nodded. "It's him. It's surely him."

They led the man toward the boat, Jack holding him by one arm and Chip by the other. Matt ran ahead.

Barking, Blaze ran along with Matt.

Matt had pulled the boat into the water and started the motor by the time the boys arrived with the man.

The wind was blowing hard again when they reached Blue Heron Key, as hard as it had been that morning. A scattering of heavy drops of rain fell. The sky was solid, luminous gray.

They half ran toward the motel, moving as fast as they could get the old man to go.

They decided to go straight to the motel office where they would be able to call Miss Adams.

No one was in the office when they arrived.

Blaze immediately found a rug on which to lie down.

"I wonder where Kelly is," Chip said.

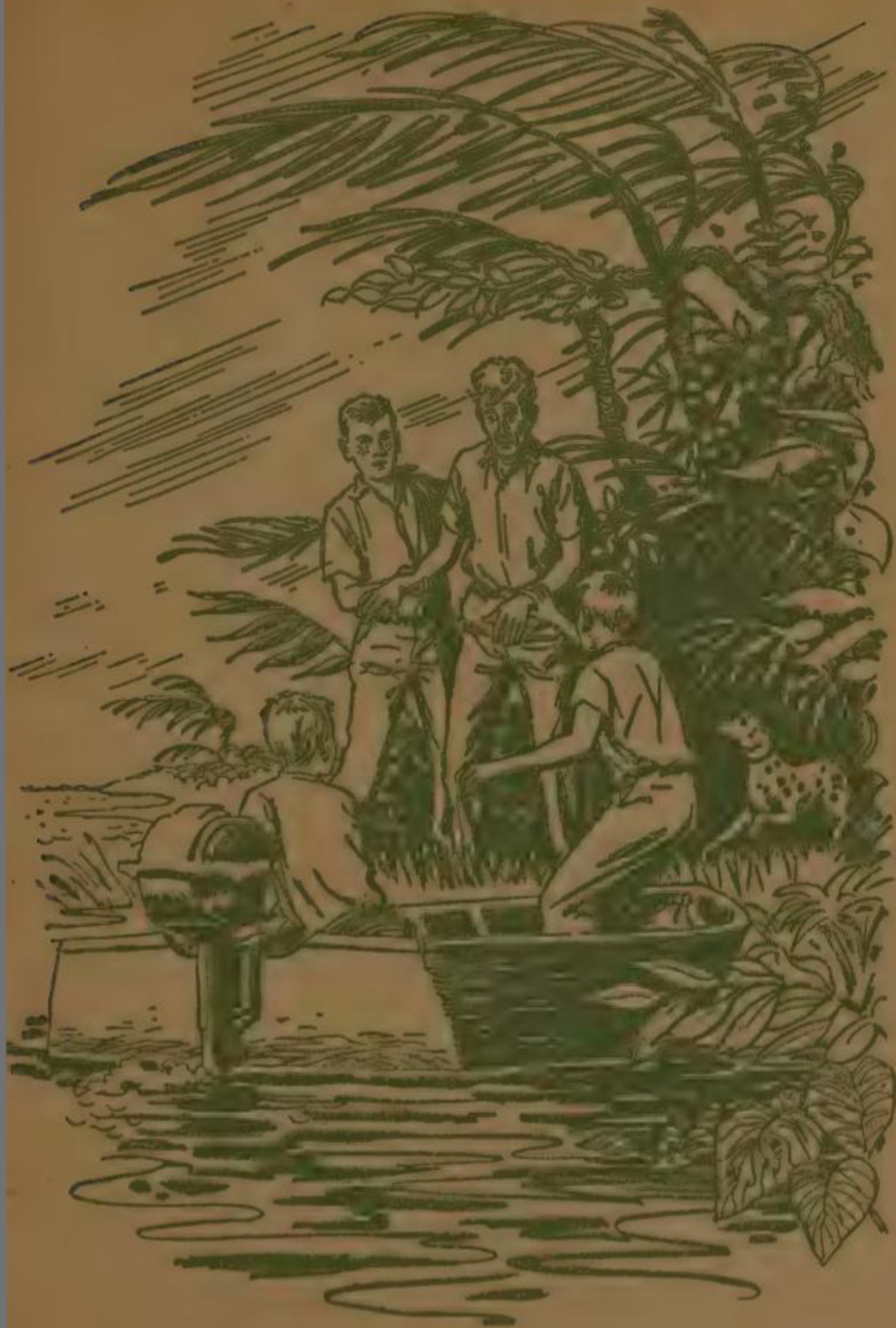
Jack didn't even take time to answer Chip. He hurried to the phone and picked up the receiver. A puzzled expression came over his face as he waited. He jiggled the hook. "It seems like the phone's dead," he remarked.

"You mean out of order?" Matt asked.

"No. Dead. It seems completely knocked out."

"How about if I ran across the road?" Chip asked.

"What's the use?" Jack said.



"Aw, I'm sure Disbareaux would let me use the phone."

"You know what I think, Chip? Cleo has already pushed over poles and stuff. Phones all over are probably knocked out. Just listen to that wind."

"You think he needs a doctor?" Matt asked, glancing over to where the old man sat slumped forward.

"Probably," Chip said. "But how are we going to find one?"

Jack went over to where the man sat and squatted in front of him. Blaze came over, but he went right back to his rug when Jack pushed him away. "We've been trying to get in touch with your daughter." Jack spoke louder and more distinctly to the man than he would in ordinary conversation. He waited a moment, then turned and said to Matt and Chip, "I'm not getting through to him."

Chip came over and squatted down, too. "What happened, Mr. Adams?" he asked. "Did somebody kidnap you? Did—"

"Chip!" Jack said admonishingly.

"I'm just trying to snap him out of it. Maybe if—"

"I sure wish he could talk," Jack mused. "He's got the answer to this whole mystery, I'm sure. But—but he just can't give it to us."

The door burst open. Kelly rushed in and slammed the door behind him.

"Boys," Kelly exclaimed, out of breath, "am I glad to see you! I have all the back windows shuttered. Now for the front ones. Would you give me a hand?" It wasn't until then that Kelly noticed the bent figure of the old man. "Who's he?" he asked, puzzled.

Jack and Chip told Kelly how they had found the man, then they explained who he was. During their explanation, Matt broke in to excuse himself. He wanted to go home—he thought his father might be needing him.

Kelly asked Chip to fill with water all the unbreakable containers he could find. Then he and Jack went outside to lower the aluminum hurricane shutters over the front windows.

People were running in the road, heading for the grocery store to make last-minute purchases of canned goods and other non-perishable items. Storefronts were being

boarded up. The driveway of the gasoline station was crowded with cars having their tanks filled.

It was while Jack and Kelly were working on the last shutter, one on an office window, that Mr. Power arrived.

"I'm taking you and Chip to the mainland," he told Jack right off. "Where's Chip?"

"Inside," Jack answered.

"There's not an awful lot of choice," Mr. Kelly said as he went on fastening the shutter. "But I think you're better off here."

"I just don't like the idea," Mr. Power said, "of being trapped on an island during a hurricane. And on a small island, at that."

Chip ran out of the motel. "Jack!" he yelled on the run. Then, seeing his father, he was diverted for a moment from what he had come out to tell his brother. But after greeting his father, he turned to Jack excitedly, "You know what? I think Mr. Adams is snapping out of it!"

"Who is Mr. Adams?" Mr. Power asked. "And what's he snapping out of?"

"It's a long story, Dad," Jack said.

"Come on," Chip urged. "Let's go inside."

They all helped to fasten down the last shutter over the office windows. Then they hurried into the office, made completely dark by the shutters.

"It's like being in a tunnel," Mr. Kelly said as he turned on the lights. "Black. No windows to see out of."

No one moved when the lights went on. They simply stood, just inside the door, staring at Mr. Adams. He had been sitting in the dark. Blaze lay on the rug near

him, asleep. Now that the lights were on, the man continued to look straight ahead, obviously without comprehension.

Jack turned to Chip. "I thought you said he snapped out of it."

"Well, he started mumbling and—" Chip started to explain.

"Look at him," Jack said irritably. "Does he look like he has snapped out of it?"

"Maybe he had a relapse," Chip suggested. "Why are you shouting at me? Can I help it?"

"Boys, boys!" Mr. Power said.

"What's wrong with the man?" Kelly asked.

"He's got amnesia, I guess," Jack said. "He's had a bad shock. He doesn't seem to be able to hear or talk."

"He was kidnaped," Chip put in.

Mr. Power raised both hands. "Stop!" he ordered. "Hold it! You said this was a long story. Now, will you please start from the beginning and tell it coherently and chronologically?"

"Second the motion," Kelly said, smiling.

Together, Jack and Chip told everything about the

man from the time they had first heard of him from his daughter, Miss Adams.

"I think we ought to find her," Jack said, "and bring her here. She was very upset."

Chip nodded. "She hardly stopped crying, Dad."

"Now, now just a minute," Mr. Power said. "How can you be certain that this man is Miss Adams's father?"

"Golly, Dad—"

"She described him to us," Jack interrupted Chip. "He must be her father. He's real tall. He's got white hair. And he's certainly lost."

Mr. Power turned to Kelly. "I still don't like the idea," he said, "of being trapped on a little island during a hurricane. That's liable to happen, too, if we go for her and bring her back here."

"Take him along with you," Kelly suggested. "Why not? Circle Key is on your way."

"That's a thought," Mr. Power said. "But what if he isn't Mr. Adams? It could be a coincidence, you know, that he fits the description."

"Leave him with me," Kelly said decisively. "I'm

going to ride this hurricane out. No reason why he shouldn't stay here. And if you get the chance when you're going through Circle Key to talk to this Adams woman, that would be fine. Just tell her I have a man here who might be her father."

"Oh, Dad," Jack said, "that wouldn't be fair. We found Adams. We should turn him over to his daughter. That's our responsibility. Don't you think it is?"

"All right," Mr. Power said. "We'll go for Miss Adams. No point wasting more time talking. We'll leave Blaze. He's sleeping. Why wake him?"

"Sleeping dogs." Chip smiled. "You're supposed to let them alone."

On the way to Circle Key Mr. Power said, "There's something I want to tell you, boys. I just can't think of it. And it's right on the tip of my tongue."

"Don't tell me you've got amnesia, too," Chip said.

"I hardly think so," his father replied. "I even remember I haven't gotten that picture story on the dinosaur bones."

"I didn't forget about your wire," Chip said quickly. "It was just that I didn't know what to take."

"Oh, sure. I understand, Chip."

"There wasn't an exciting angle," Chip explained. "You already took pictures of the bones."

The traffic became noticeably heavier as they approached Circle Key.

Mr. Power commented, "Looks like everyone but Kelly—and his uninvited guest—are heading for the mainland. And I'm telling you, I'll be glad when we are."

After they parked at the roadside zoo, the place where they expected to find Miss Adams, they took a moment to prepare for the dash through the wind and rain. "Looks deserted," Mr. Power said, peering out the window.

"It's all boarded up," Jack said. "That's why."

No one answered when Mr. Power knocked. He tried the door. It was locked.

"What do we do now?" Mr. Power asked.

Jack pounded on the door, as though in answer to his father's question. He used the side of his fist like a hammer. He kicked the door a few times, too.

Miss Adams appeared almost at once. Her eyes were

red from recent crying. When she heard their news, happiness lit up her face.

"My sister and her husband left for Miami," she said. "But I couldn't go. I couldn't leave, knowing Father was still here. How is he?"

"Oh—oh, he's fine," Jack said.

"Yeah," Chip added, "he's great."

"Where did you find him?" Miss Adams asked. "What happened?"

"We didn't speak to him," Chip said. "You see—"

"He didn't feel like talking about his experience," Jack put in quickly.

"Yeah," Chip echoed. "He didn't feel like it."

Mr. Power looked at his sons disapprovingly. He was about to speak, apparently to prepare Miss Adams for the true condition of her father, but he changed his mind. He obviously decided to leave it up to Jack and Chip to get out of the hole they were digging for themselves.

Heading back to Blue Heron Key, there was no traffic at all. They made good time.

When they arrived at the motel, before leaving the

car, Jack said hesitantly, "Miss Adams?"

"Yes?" She turned to listen.

"Your father might be tired, you know."

"Yeah," Chip said. "Don't expect to find him all rested."

"Just what are you trying to say, boys?" Mr. Power asked. "I think you should—"

"Is there anything wrong with Father?" Miss Adams was suddenly alarmed. She looked from Jack to Chip to Mr. Power, questioningly, worriedly. When they didn't answer immediately, her alarm changed to panic. "Why didn't you tell me?" she screamed. "Why did you keep it from me? He's hurt! He's—"

They tried to explain, but Miss Adams was already rushing out of the car.

Chip grabbed her by the arm. But when she turned on him, so wild and furious was her look that he let go.

They all rushed after her.

19

Trapped!

Jack, Chip, and Mr. Power came to an abrupt halt. They stopped just inside the office door.

Malcolm Adams was on his feet, smiling, his arms outstretched in front of him.

"Martha!" he cried.

Miss Adams ran quickly to her father. He took her in his arms and held her close. Tall as she was, she reached just to his shoulder. Compared with his white hair, her red hair looked very red.

Kelly came over to Mr. Power. "That proves it," he said, grinning. "Jack and Chip were right. Our visitor and Miss Adams are father and daughter, all right."

"What made him snap out of it?" Chip asked curiously. "Just seeing her?"

"Why not?" Jack said.

Mr. Power smiled. "Mission accomplished," he said. As he turned to the door he added, "Well, we'll be on our way now."

"But, Dad . . ." Jack said.

"What is it?" his father demanded. "We haven't time for talk, Jack. As it is, we're going to have trouble getting to the mainland."

Miss Adams left her father's arms and came running toward the door where they were all standing.

"Please forgive me," she said to Mr. Power warmly, "for the way I behaved. I thought something had happened to Father and you hadn't told me. You've no idea the stress I've been under."

"I understand," Mr. Power said. "We're in a rush to—"

"Do you want a lift?" Jack asked Miss Adams. "What do you and your father plan to do?"

"You're welcome to come with us," Mr. Power said. "But—but I would like to get started."

"Oh, no." Miss Adams shook her head. "You've done so much for us already."

"We've plenty of room," Mr. Power said.

"So have I," Mr. Kelly said. "All my units are vacant. Everybody's run off. I told Mr. Power, I think a person is as safe here at Blue Heron as he is trying to make a run for it."

Miss Adams glanced back at her father. "I don't know if he's strong enough," she murmured. "Speeding in a car might be too much for him."

Mr. Adams moved toward where they were standing.

"Come on, boys," Mr. Power said. Blaze got up and stretched. "You, too, Blaze. Let's get going."

"Dad," Jack said, "can't we just ask Mr. Adams what happened?"

"Jack!" Mr. Power said sharply. "Don't you understand this hurricane isn't going to wait for us!"

"I can't begin to tell you," Miss Adams said, "how thankful I am for what you've done."

"If the going's too rough," Kelly said, "come back. We'll be here. That is, I hope we will."

The boys said good-bye. As the group left, Miss Adams called after them. "Good luck! And thank you! *Thank you!*"

They rushed to the car and climbed in quickly.

"It's not safe out there!" Mr. Power gasped, out of breath. "That wind is tearing things up."

He turned the key to start the car. The motor didn't catch. He tried again and again. "This is just dandy," he grumbled.

"How about the choke, Dad?" Jack asked.

"It almost sounds as if I'm out of gas. But I filled the tank before I left Key West." Mr. Power looked puzzled.

Suddenly Mr. Adams appeared in front of the car, looking like an apparition. His battle with the wind and with his daughter, who had rushed out to get him, made him appear even more ghostly.

Mr. Power and his sons ran back with them into the motel office. Blaze brought up the rear.

"I wanted to speak to you," Mr. Adams told Mr. Power as soon as they were inside.

Miss Adams started to apologize for her father's

detaining them, but Mr. Power interrupted. "I stalled," he said, "before I even got started."

"Wind probably drove moisture into your ignition," Kelly said.

"I flooded the carburetor," Mr. Power declared. "That's my guess."

"How could you, Dad?" Jack said. "You've got a manual choke. Remember when you—"

"I wanted to speak to you," Mr. Adams said again.

Everyone suddenly became quiet. Tall, gaunt Mr. Adams stood before them like an ancient prophet. The shuttered windows isolated them from a world known only to them now by the mournful, insistent howl of the wind.

Chip sat down. So did Miss Adams.

Just then the electric lights went out.

"You see I was expecting that," Mr. Kelly said with a laugh. He pointed to the kerosene lamps which he had lit and which now furnished some light for the room.

The lamps cast wavering, ghostly shadows on the walls about them.



"I'm a farmer," Mr. Adams said, breaking the silence. "I've been a farmer all my life out in Ohio. When my plow struck those bones—"

"Bones!" Chip exclaimed, popping off of his chair.

"Bones," Mr. Adams said, nodding. His shadow, that ran up onto the ceiling, nodded, too.

"Sit down, Chip," Jack ordered.

"Dinosaur bones?" Chip asked, ignoring his brother.

"I didn't know what kind of bones they were," Mr. Adams said. "They were big, that's all I knew. And I thought they might make a mighty interesting addition to my son-in-law's zoo. So when I retired and came to live with my daughter and her husband, I shipped them on ahead of me as a gift for them. That's all I intended—"

"Father," Miss Adams said, "it's not necessary to tell all this."

"The boys saved me, Martha. You said so. It's only right they should hear the whole story."

"We've nothing else to do," Kelly said. "Can't even read the paper in this light. And there's no radio."

"I believe in being honest," Mr. Adams said.

"Were they dinosaur bones?" Chip asked quickly.

"Let him talk," Jack said sharply. "Will you, Chip?"

"I didn't want my son-in-law to make use of those bones in any fraudulent way," Mr. Adams went on. "But he and this man at the motel were going to do that."

"Just as we figured," Kelly muttered.

"They met secretly one night. They decided how they were going to bring the bones in a boat down to the motel site—"

"And bury them at night," Chip finished eagerly.

"Why, yes," Mr. Adams said, surprised that Chip should know. "Clarence told me. Clarence is my son-in-law. He was bragging when he told me. And when I told him that I was going to expose the whole thing, he was furious. But I didn't even have a chance to tell my daughter—his wife."

"They took you out to that mangrove island, didn't they?" Jack said.

"Clarence said I'd change my mind about the whole thing, once I cooled off. That man has a warped mind. He had no need for this crooked scheme. He's been

making a fine living with his zoo."

Miss Adams interrupted at this point. She persuaded her father to sit down.

"Then the boys found you," Kelly said. "Is that it?"

"I don't remember that." Mr. Adams's shadow, now that he was seated, blended with those on the side wall. "The two men who were guarding me had one of these little radios. The more they heard about the hurricane, the more frightened they got. Finally, they just ran off without a word and left me. I remember being terribly thirsty—not hungry, but thirsty. I wandered around looking for water. Then the next thing I knew"—he paused as he pointed with his entire arm—"I saw Martha coming through that door."

"Did you yell for help?" Chip asked. "One night when they had you out in a boat?"

"Were you in that boat that I called to?" Mr. Adams asked in surprise.

"We sure were," Jack said. "And we tried to find you, too, but we didn't have any luck. Your boat just seemed to disappear. We tied a handkerchief at the spot where you—"

"I can explain that, son," Mr. Adams interrupted. "I didn't understand what was going on at the time. It's not until now that I know."

"What?" Chip asked eagerly. "What?"

"The men who held me prisoner were very amused about a trick they said they played. I remember now that they mentioned taking a handkerchief which was tied in one place and putting it in another place."

"Wow!" Chip exclaimed. "That was neat. They sure fooled us."

"And I thought when I went off to Key West," Mr. Power murmured to Kelly, "that the boys would be stuck for something to do. Well, I was wrong. Dead wrong."

Mr. Adams shook hands with Jack as he thanked him. He held Jack's hand with both of his. Then he repeated the ritual with Chip.

Mr. Power tried to break in on Mr. Adams, but he had no luck. He was eager to try starting the car again, eager to get to the mainland. Kelly continued to advise him to stay right where he was.

When the car started immediately a few moments

later, Mr. Power said, "It must have been over-choked."

"This car is like Matt's boat," Chip said. "You never can figure it out."

Mr. Power had a hard time leaving the driveway of the motel. The traffic toward the mainland was so heavy that it seemed impossible to cut in. But, finally, there was an opening. Mr. Power raced forward.

After about ten minutes, the cars were still bumper to bumper. Mr. Power said, "A car is probably stalled up ahead. That's what's causing the tie-up."

Chip suggested trying the radio for some traffic reports. When they turned on the radio, they heard an excited voice say, ". . . I repeat, Cleo will definitely strike the Keys!"

The man on the radio then told the speed and direction of the hurricane. He mentioned that traffic jams in Miami's business district were being caused by the drawbridges, which were raised for boats moving up the Miami River to safe harbor.

"Boys," Mr. Power said, "you know what I think? I think *this jam* stretches all the way to the mainland."

"Everyone is leaving," Jack said. "That's why."



"I don't like the thought of being out here on the road when Cleo arrives," his father said thoughtfully.

"And, Dad, we might. I mean, we're crawling and Cleo's zipping along at—what is it, fifteen miles an hour?"

"Do you feel the wind against the car?" Chip asked.

"It's catching us broadside," Jack said.

"I'm worried," Mr. Power said frankly, "about what's going to happen when it starts raining. Cars will be stalling. They're bound to. It will be a mess."

"Does it always rain when there's a hurricane?" Chip asked.

"Always," Mr. Power replied.

"If we're going back," Jack said, "we better go now."

"Kelly may have been right," Chip put in. "He kept telling us to stay, Dad. And he's lived down here a long time. He should know the best thing to do."

"What do you think, boys? Should we head back?" Mr. Power asked.

"I'm all for it," Chip said.

"It's not going to be very good being caught out here," Jack told his father. "You said so yourself."

Mr. Power remained silent. The boys kept quiet, too—giving him a chance to make up his mind.

Suddenly, still without a word, Mr. Power made a fast U-turn.

The lane south was empty—ominously empty.

"This feels great," Chip said. "We're really moving now."

"Yeah," Jack agreed.

Suddenly it started pouring. The windshield wipers couldn't take care of the flooded windshield fast enough. Mr. Power sat hunched forward on his seat, trying to see.

They all felt relief when the rain slowed. Then it stopped completely.

The windshield wipers were still going back and forth. The sound they made was the only sound in the car.

"Don't need them now," Mr. Power said as he switched off the wipers.

All at once it seemed terribly quiet in the car.

"What's happened to the wind?" Chip asked.

"Don't complain," Mr. Power told him, "because

it's died down a little for a change."

"Golly, Dad, it seems to me as if it's stopped completely."

"That's hardly something to worry about," Mr. Power said with a smile. The sky at the horizon had turned a luminous pale green, which seemed to be spreading out like spilled ink.

They rode along silently through the eerie stillness. Even Blaze was affected. He started whining pitifully.

"Jack, do you remember what that fellow in the diner said?" Chip asked. "I mean, that it's supposed to get real quiet just before—"

"That's what I've been thinking about," Jack said.

"Dad, can't you go faster?" Chip fairly shouted.

"I'm going as fast—"

"Go faster, Dad! Cleo's liable to be here any second!"

"Chip!" Mr. Power said sternly. "Calm down!" Jack restrained Chip with both hands, saying, "Take it easy!"

They rode in silence after that. Even Blaze understood that he was to be quiet.

Mr. Power's complete attention focused on the road ahead. Several times he swerved around objects that the wind had blown into the road.

"Have to watch out for live electric cables," he muttered. "Dangerous. Very dangerous. . . ."

Wind and rain started up again as they rode over the bridge onto Blue Heron Key.

"Yippee!" Chip cried. "We beat Cleo here. But not by much."

"Yell if you see electric cables down," Mr. Power said. "Here in town, there might be."

"Dad, Dad!" Chip shouted after a moment.

Mr. Power immediately put on the brakes. He slowed down so fast that he had trouble controlling the car.

"It's okay, Dad. It's okay. I didn't mean for you to stop," Chip said.

"What is it?" Mr. Power shouted irritably.

"The sign on the diner. It's half down. I just wanted you to see it. It's hanging by a hinge."

"Oh, man," Jack said with disgust. "And you had to yell for that."

Obviously not to waste time, Mr. Power made no comment. He concentrated on speeding up the car.

When they pulled into the motel drive, they hastily took out of the car a footlocker that contained cameras and other photography equipment. Jack and his father fought the wind and rain as they carried the locker between them. Chip had all he could do to hold onto Blaze's leash. Frightened by the howling wind, Blaze

kept spinning around, his back arched, his tail between his legs.

They had almost reached the door of the office when a terrific grinding roar caused them to turn.

The luminous green sky had turned a pale yellow. The wind bent the palms and shook them savagely. Across the road, they saw the papier-maché flesh of the mastodon being torn from its huge frame. They heard the grinding roar continue until every bit of the mastodon had been wrenched away.

In spite of the wind and rain, Jack, Chip, and their father were held motionless by what they saw. The structure of the mastodon was now being yanked from its moorings. Slowly it rose from the ground. Black against the luminous yellow sky, it sailed off like a monstrous inflated skeleton. A flying skeleton!

Blaze tore the leash from Chip's hand. He ran straight to the office door. Rising on his hind legs, he scratched frantically at the door with his paws.

Kelly had opened the door by the time the boys and their father reached it. He held it for them, while they were practically thrown inside by the wind.

Everyone began talking at once. Kelly wanted to know what had happened. Miss Adams and her father said they were glad the Powers had returned. Mr. Power explained what had occurred.

The boys were surprised to see Matt there.

"How come you're here?" Chip asked.

"It was raining so hard, I couldn't leave. I just came to see how you were making out."

"Well, you're not going to be able to leave now," Mr. Power told him. "No doubt about it, the hurricane has arrived."

Kelly looked up at the ceiling. "I hope the roof holds," he said. "We might get damp if it blows off."

"Did you see the mastodon across the road blow away?" Jack asked him.

Kelly shook his head. So did Miss Adams and her father and Matt. Blaze moved closer to Miss Adams's feet and let her stroke his head.

"Oh, I wish I could have gotten pictures of that," Mr. Power said. "But I didn't have a camera. I had one"—he pointed at the foot locker on the floor—"but it was in there."

"Wouldn't that have been great, Dad, for the picture story?" Jack said. "That mastodon flying off. And in color. The sky and everything."

Mr. Power nodded but said nothing.

Everyone seemed to have run out of things to say at that moment.

Suddenly Chip broke into the stillness. "We forgot them!" he shouted. "The bones! They're out there in the case!"

"How do you know?" Jack said. "Disbareaux probably—"

"They must be!" Chip declared.

"Well, it's just too bad," Mr. Power said firmly. "Who is going out in a hundred-mile-an-hour wind to—"

"But, Dad," Chip broke in, "those bones are terribly important. They're more important than your cameras. And you know you wouldn't leave your cameras out in the car."

"Chip—"

That was as far as Mr. Power got. Chip spun about and raced to the door. Mr. Power lunged to grab him.

But he missed Chip, twisting his ankle so badly that it gave way under him and he sank to the floor with a grimace.

Jack and Matt helped Mr. Power to get up. Kelly brought a chair and shoved it under him.

No sooner had he sat down, however, than Mr. Power rose to his feet. He limped badly as he tried to walk.

"You better sit down and rest your ankle, Dad," Jack said.

"I'm worried. High voltage cables might be down out there. . . ." He didn't finish.

With the same impulsiveness Chip had shown, Mr. Power limped painfully to the door. He had his hand on the doorknob when Jack rushed up to his father and turned him from the door.

"You can't be any help to Chip," Jack said. "You can hardly walk."

Before Mr. Power could protest, Jack opened the door, preparing to go outside himself. Suddenly Matt appeared and forced his way past him, then through the partially opened door.

Heads down, Jack and Matt struggled toward the road. The furious wind buffeted them about. They didn't see Chip ahead of them. They couldn't even see the road.

A luminous spot in the sky suddenly made Chip visible. It lasted only an instant, however, for clouds immediately darkened the sky.

Jack and Matt fought their way to the place where they had seen Chip. He was there, all right, but he had been blown far off course, confused by the whirlpool of sand, wind, and rain. The boys had a difficult time finding the exhibition case.

When they finally reached it, they saw at once that the bones were still inside.

Jack tried to open the case. "It's locked!" he yelled.

They thought of a plan to carry the bones, case and

all, but quickly discovered the case was bolted down.

While they were searching for something with which to break the glass of the case, Blaze arrived. He tried desperately to pull them back to the motel. Each time he went to one boy and was pushed away, he went to another. He made the boys' work even more difficult.

Chip found a cinder block and used it like a battering ram to break the glass on one side of the case. The boys quickly gathered up the bones.

By the time they got back to the motel office, they were exhausted. They put the bones on the floor and sprawled into chairs.

Mr. Power, Kelly, and the Adamses waited until the boys caught their breath. Then they congratulated them for what they had done.

"Bawl out Blaze, will you?" Chip said. "I'm too tired."

"He really made things tough for us," Jack told everyone.

Blaze suddenly discovered the bones on the floor. He challenged them with his barks. Then he approached them cautiously. But each time he backed away, growl-

ing. He was puzzled by the strange objects.

"They're bones, Blaze," Chip assured him.

"He recognizes them," Kelly said. "Their size bothers him. He's never chewed on any as big as those."

"Oh, boys," Mr. Power exclaimed. "Now I remember what I wanted to tell you—and I couldn't think of it. The size of those bones. That's what made me remember."

Mr. Power then told them that the big man whom they had suspected of blowing up the plane in Miami was an FBI man.

"I ran across him again in Key West," Mr. Power said. "I'm certainly thankful I'm not down there now."

"Well," Kelly said with just the hint of a smile, "we don't have the convenience of electric lights. And you may miss your favorite TV program."

Everyone laughed at that. They were all very cheerful.

Then, suddenly, the howl of the wind changed to a deafening roar. Everyone tensed. Their pleasant mood was instantly shattered.

"Man, oh man!" Jack gasped.

"Cleo's *really* here now," Kelly said.

Judging by the way he looked up at the ceiling, he was expecting it to be blown away any second.

One of the kerosene lamps went out. Kelly went to work relighting it immediately.

"How long will this last?" Chip asked.

"Too long," Jack answered grimly.

"You think it'll get worse? Maybe this isn't even Cleo yet," Chip said faintly.

"This is Cleo, all right," Kelly said. "I know a hurricane when I hear one."

"It's important to be calm," Mr. Adams said.

"You're certainly right," Kelly agreed. "People on sinking ships usually sing songs. One thing about that—it gives people with bad voices a chance. Nobody's going to object to off-key singing under circumstances like that. Personally, I prefer telling jokes. Does anybody have a joke he wants to tell?"

"Did you ever hear the one," Mr. Power said, "about the fellow who was always bragging? He was a big bag of wind and—"

"No jokes with wind in them," Kelly objected. "Don't

you hear it out there? We have enough wind."

This brought laughter. But it was strained laughter. Chip whispered to Jack, "Boy, this is a lot of whistling in the dark." Chip's eyelids felt heavy. He was very tired. "I think Mr. Kelly is especially scared. He's trying to keep you and me and Matt from going off the deep end."

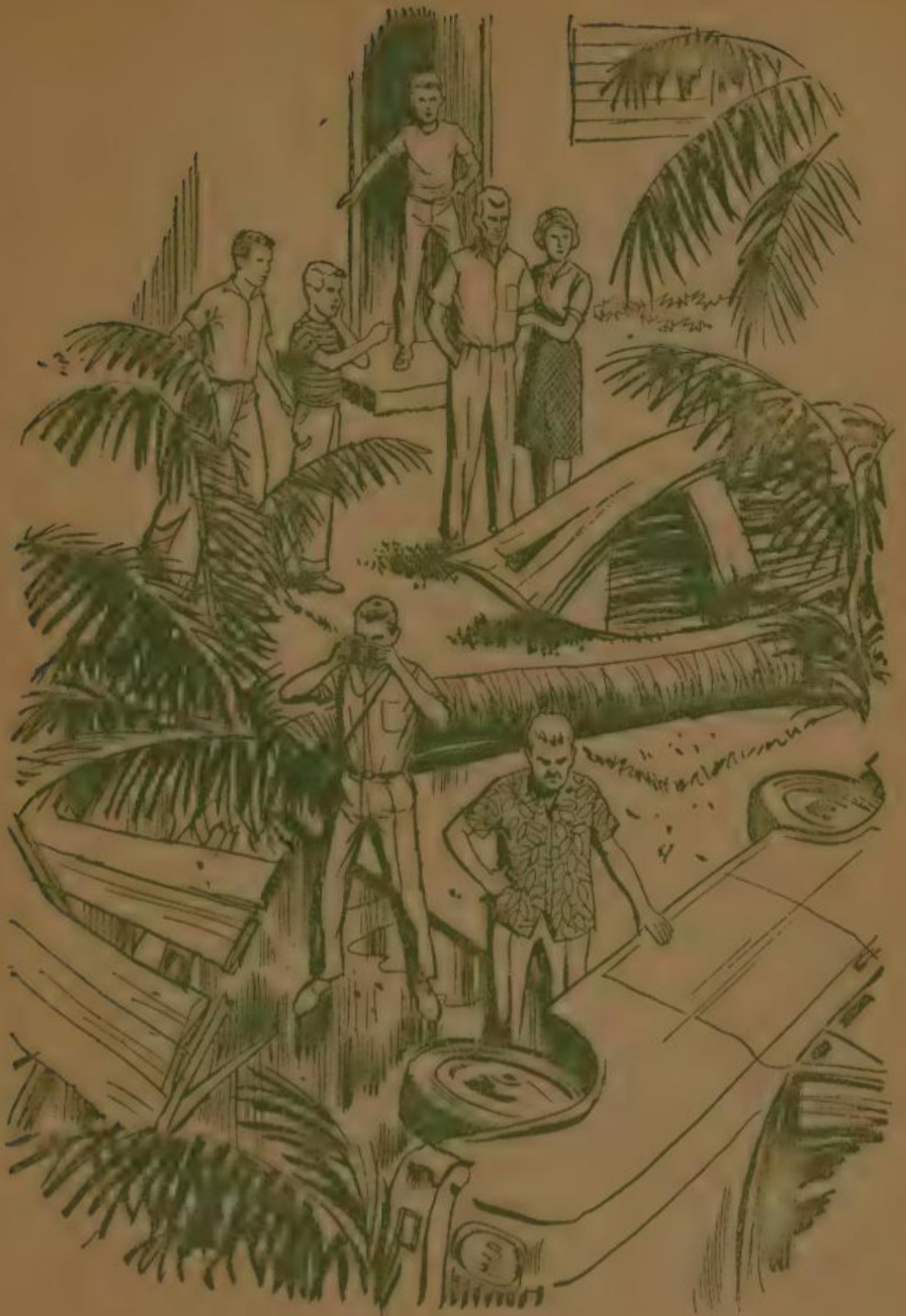
The next thing Chip knew, he woke up.

He felt very stiff. He was in a chair instead of in bed. Then he realized he was in Kelly's office and remembered the hurricane. He got up in a hurry.

The office door was open and Chip rushed for it. Everyone else was already outside—Kelly, Matt, Mr. Adams and his daughter, Mr. Power, and Jack.

They were all too busy looking at the awful effects of the hurricane to notice Chip's arrival. A roof that had been sliced off lay on the road. Trees were uprooted everywhere. A smashed rowboat was on the lawn. Mr. Power was limping around with his camera, taking pictures.

Suddenly Chip noticed the absolute quiet. It was more



than just the absence of the howling wind.

He went over to Jack and Matt. "How come it's so quiet?" he asked.

"Kelly told us," Jack said. "All the birds have been killed off. And you're used to hearing them."

"Especially in the morning," Matt added.

"Wow!" Chip gasped. "This is awful."

Matt and Jack agreed with solemn nods.

At that moment Mr. Power and Kelly called them. Mr. Power's rented car had been blown over onto its side. With all of them lifting together, they were able to get it back on its wheels again.

"This is one of the advantages," Mr. Power said, "of having a small car."

"Do you think the motor's okay?" Chip asked. "You think it'll run?"

"Now, Chip," Kelly said with a thin smile, "you're asking for too much. You want it to run, too?"

Mr. Power laughed. "Boys," he said, "if we're joking at a time like this, it's because we're thankful that we're all alive. We had better get going and see if we can help people down the road."

"I should get home," Matt said, a frightened look on his face.

"Oh, Matt," Mr. Power remembered. "Your father was here before you woke up. He's all right. Everything's okay. He said he got the motors out of all his boats in time and he sank the hulls in shallow water. That protected them."

"Matt, you sure turned pale," Chip said.

"So? I suddenly wondered what happened at home, that's all."

"Hey, Chip," Jack said, "did you see what happened to Disbareaux's motel?"

The roof which had been blown into the highway blocked the view. They all moved to one side, from which point the motel site could be seen. All the construction work had been leveled to the ground.

"I don't understand it," Kelly said. "According to the building code, steel columns must reinforce the blocks. Of course, Disbareaux was in such a hurry to get his motel up that he—"

"I'll bet that was the deal he made with the building inspector," Jack said excitedly.

"What deal was that?" Kelly asked, puzzled.

"Yes," Mr. Power said. "What do you know about a deal?"

Jack then told them about the memo pad and the doodling on it, and how their discovery of the pad had disconcerted Disbareaux.

"Well," Kelly said, "that explains why his place was so completely demolished."

"He won't build a motel again here, will he?" Chip asked.

Kelly shook his head. "Even if he wanted to, I doubt if he could ever get the financing for it."

"You're all set then," Jack said happily.

"It's too bad, Dad," Chip said. "I mean, that you didn't get your picture story."

"Who says I didn't?" Mr. Power said, smiling.

"Well. . . ." Chip looked puzzled.

"Come on, boys." Mr. Power started limping toward the motel office. "I've got something to show you."

Mr. Power brought the pictures outside.

"I developed these during the night," he said, handing the pictures to the boys. "While Cleo was blowing

and you were sleeping soundly.”

“I’d like to look at them again,” Miss Adams said. “I’m sure Father would, too. I think they’re just wonderful.”

“They’re prize winners, in my opinion,” Mr. Power said proudly.

It wasn’t until then that Matt, Jack, and Chip realized that the pictures were of them rescuing the mastodon bones.

“Here’s one of Blaze,” Chip exclaimed delightedly. “He’s got me by the sleeve and is pulling for all he’s worth.”

“And here’s the best one of all,” Mr. Power said happily. His voice was full of pride as he pulled out his favorite shot. It showed the boys gathered around the exhibition case. Hovering above them, flapping wildly in the wind, was the skeleton of the papier-maché mastodon. Its mysterious return made the boys shudder in spite of themselves.

“These photos have everything,” Mr. Power said. “There you are—rescuing the remains of an animal that lived thousands of years ago. Risking your necks

to do it, too. That's real drama. Human interest. And I think I've captured the eerie qualities of the situation. Boys, I'm going to turn over to the three of you the money I get for this picture story. A tangible reward for what you did."

When the boys stopped leaping into the air with excitement, they tried to decide what they would buy with the money.

"Do you think I'll have enough to get a boat?" Matt asked.

"A new motor, anyhow," Jack said. Then he laughed. "Maybe even a Whispering Johnson."

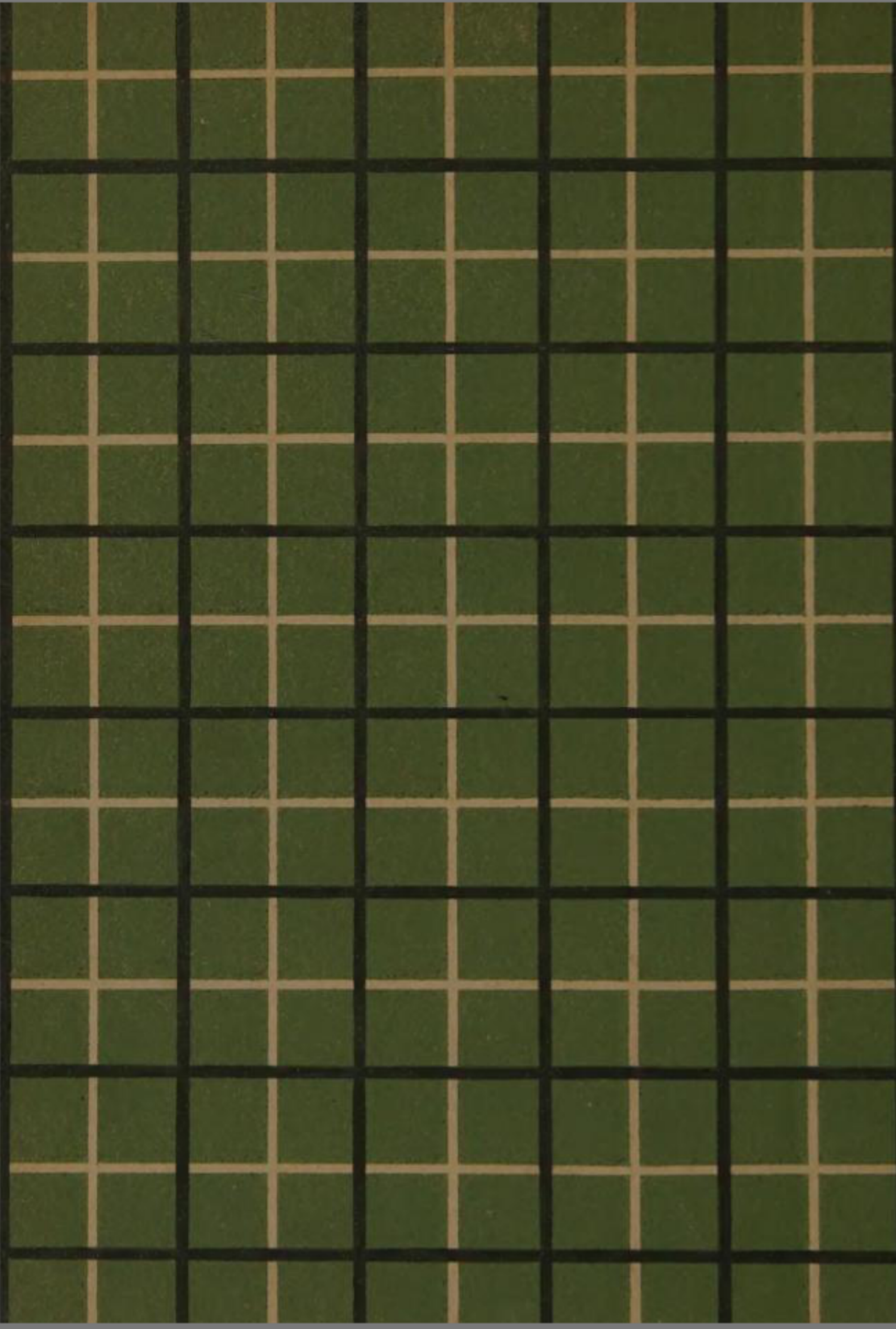
"Well, you guys," Chip said, "admit it. This was one time my rushing into something was okay."

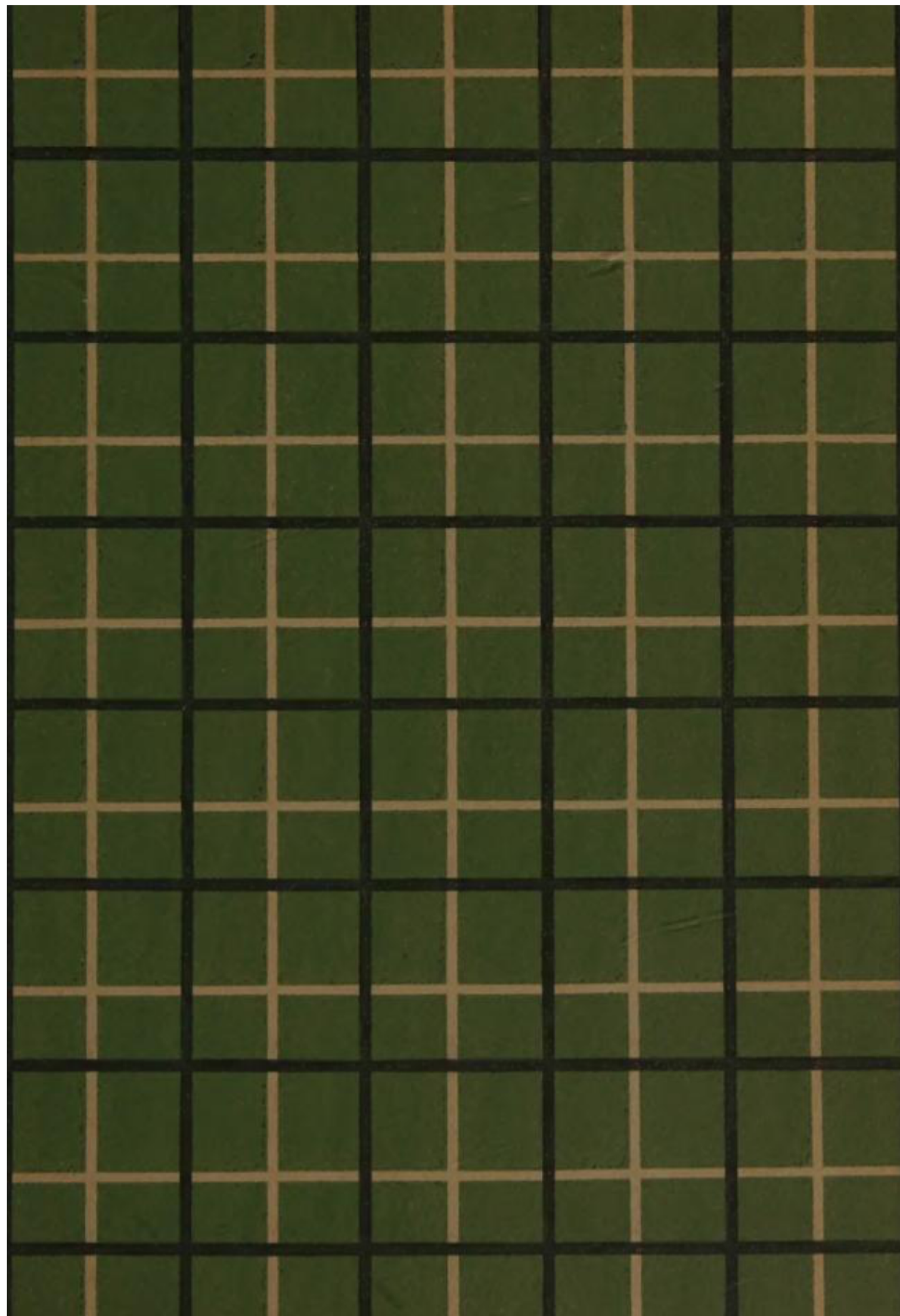
"Come on," Jack said, "let's find Blaze. He's not being cut in on the loot. The least we can do is scratch his back—or something like that."

THE POWER BOYS

The Mystery of
THE HAUNTED SKYSCRAPER

The Mystery of
THE FLYING SKELETON







Whitman

1524